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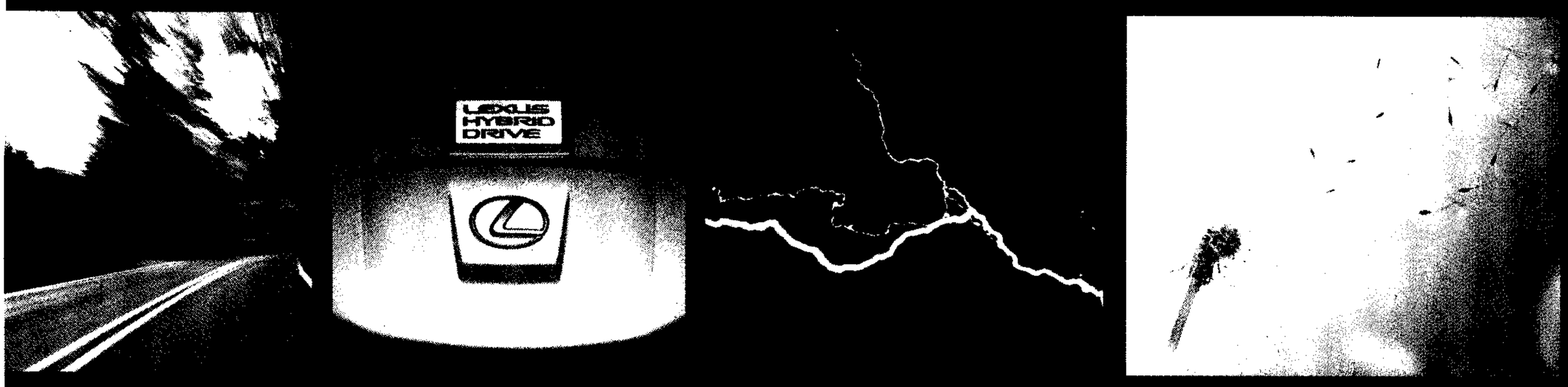

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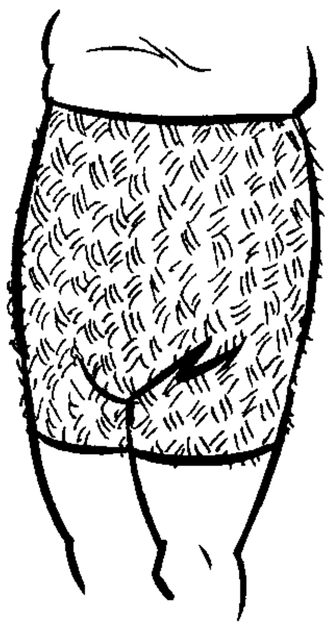

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ABC

Counting the days

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Curse Of Gnome

SOME of the world's finest hotels lost a valued customer when parliament's Public Accounts Commission decided to clamp down on the lavish travel arrangements, exposed by the *Eye*, of the head of the National Audit Office, Sir John Bourn.

Until now there were no rules governing how much taxpayers' cash the country's top public spending watchdog splashes out on hotels and flights for himself and his wife. So staying at £500+ per night establishments (like the Sacher in Vienna) and dining at the plushest restaurants at public expense did not, in the commission's view, amount to "impropriety". Nor, apparently, did fibbing about why he did so (the *Eye* also exposed the official excuse that "host" organisations recommended where he stayed as nonsense).

So Sir John keeps his job – but he will be on a tight leash. He will have to stick to spending limits imposed on top civil servants – quite a come-down – and have his travel plans approved beforehand and scrutinised by the Public Accounts Commission afterwards. That, the NAO hopes, will draw a line under the matter.

But that remains to be seen. Two weeks ago Sir John unveiled a report with the admonition that "public officials… must have a full understanding of whether and how the private sector's price and service proposals offer value for money".

Evidently Sir John was never too concerned about "price and service proposal" at the luxury hotels he routinely checked into with his wife. Will other "public officials" on the receiving end of Sir John's belt-tightening lectures be able to take him seriously again?

AFTER the *Eye* exposed the dodgy practices of "land banker" Andy Smith – selling "self-build" plots in areas where planning permission would never be granted, such as flood plains and protected woodland – the outraged businessman threatened to sue for "liable" (*Eyes passim*).

No writ was forthcoming. But Smith has at least had his day in court. Not the high court, however, but Barnstaple county court where he was declared bankrupt last week after proceedings were brought by his brother and a cousin.

The future of his latest venture, Lenwood Country Club in Bideford, north Devon – which has played host to such glitterati as, er, Bobby Davro – remains unclear.

SO. FAREWELL then Richard Granger, head of the NHS National Programme for IT, who last weekend announced that he had had enough.

The man who likened contractors to huskies that can be shot if they go lame, himself limps off halfway through the ten-year plan with a fraction of the programme delivered.

Insiders aren't that surprised. Many detected a valedictory note to a speech last week in which he made outlandish claims of accomplishment and dismissed critics as talking "complete tosh", even though the central tasks of patient record and hospital IT systems remain mired.

But perhaps Granger's departure presents an opportunity. The government has yet to respond to a public accounts committee (PAC) report recommending "an urgent independent review of the performance of [suppliers] against their contractual obligations". A new IT boss (and probably a new health secretary) could agree to such a review, which would duly find plenty of contractual breaches. The deals could be ripped up, with the suppliers perhaps paid a few quid to go quietly.

Of the slated £12bn, less than £3bn has so far been spent on the floundering programme. So it's not too late to cut taxpayer losses.

EVEN private equity's leading lights, foremost among them the chancellor's close confidant and former APAX boss Sir Ronald Cohen, now admit that Gordon Brown has been feather-bedding them for years. So it's no surprise that when industry representatives came up before the Treasury select committee last week, the fat cats got a kicking.

An earlier admission from one private equity figure that executives were paying lower tax rates than their cleaning ladies prompted committee member George Mudie to claim "the chancellor is bound to do something about it", while chairman and Brown loyalist John McFall even made a dangerously "old" Labour call for "progressive taxation".

Oddly the same tough-talking MPs now railing against the evils of private equity and its bosses' paltry tax contributions have never confronted the man to blame – a certain G. Brown, architect of the tax concessions that the fat cats unsurprisingly exploit.

Nor, despite many opportunities, have they ever picked him up on his ten-year failure to address tax breaks for another very rich group who also pay lower rates than their cleaners: the City bankers and Labour donors who declare themselves "non-domiciled", probably including Cohen. Every budget Brown declares his review of this rule "ongoing" and every year fearless members of the Treasury committee led by McFall stifle the outrage they obviously feel about such "non-progressive" taxation and decide not to ask him about it.

Brown himself, meanwhile, wooed the anti-private equity campaigners of the GMB union by assuring their conference of "justice and equity in the treatment of the tax arrangements in that area". Note "*that area*". No promise of justice and equity in other areas. The "non-dom" Labour-funding billionaires will be relieved.

CABINET WHIP ROUND FOR BLAIR'S LEAVING PRESENT

NEWS

AS hundreds of homes were flooded again last week, soggy householders were wondering what became of all the government's promises to improve the nation's flood defences.

There has been no shortage of reports detailing the problems with defences since the devastating floods of 2000. Ministers pledged in 2003 to implement the conclusions of the Flood and Coastal Defence Funding Review, seeking new funding to maintain and improve protection to built-up areas.

A 2004 report on future flooding by the DTI's "horizon scanning" centre Foresight pointed out that if flood management policies remained unchanged, "the damage could be very costly". And 2004's National Assessment of Defence Needs and Costs for Flood and Coastal Erosion Management said funding plans fell £700m short over the next 10 years. Damage from the 2000 floods was estimated by insurers to have cost £750m.

With incredible timing, the National Audit Office (NAO) produced a report last week showing that the Environment Agency had not met its target to keep just 63 percent of England's flood defence system up to scratch. The agency says it needs another £150m a year from the government to bring everything up to target standards.

That will come as no surprise to *Eye* readers, who may recall how in February *Eye* 1178 reported the numerous budget cutbacks made by the agency's various regional flood defence committees. A major improvement scheme was called off in York due to lack of funds. As the *Eye* went to press, much of York remained under flood warnings.

Street Of Shame

WHY might David Cameron, Rupert Murdoch and the feeble Press Complaints Commission all find themselves embarrassed by the latest cost-cutting redundancies at News International? The common denominator is Andy Coulson, who had to resign as editor of the *News of the Screws* after the royal phone-tapping scandal but has now been hired as chief Tory spin-doctor by ex-PR man Cameron.

About 30 *Screws* hacks, including some executives, are heading for the Wapping exit and several have intimate knowledge of phone-scams at the *Screws*. With sacked royal editor Clive Goodman out of jail and pressing ahead with an unfair dismissal case, questions about what Coulson knew and when he knew it may soon become rather insistent. Some of the newly departed staff may be willing to testify in his case, now that they are no longer on the payroll. That will be particularly blush-making for the PCC, which pathetically "cleared" Coulson on the technicality that as he was no longer editor they had no authority to question him.

Why doesn't News International pay off Goodman and buy his silence with a confidentiality clause? Wapping insiders suggest it's the Digger himself who has blocked a Goodman pay-off on the grounds that news of it would inevitably leak – and lay the company open to charges of paying off its own in-house criminal. They also suspect that certain senior figures haven't been totally candid with the boss about just how high up the command structure knowledge of the phone-tapping racket really went. But how much longer will Rupert – and his new dining companion Dave Cameron – remain in ignorance?

FORMER *Daily Express* editor Richard "The Monk" Addis has been talking up his new venture for months.

The old lothario is proposing to produce a daily digest rather like *The Week*, and claims somewhat surprisingly that he has the permission of all the newspaper groups to fillet their rags for the best stories and then print them in a format targeted for different postcode districts in London and the south.

Whether Rupert Murdoch, the Barclay brothers or Richard Desmond will really allow him to nick their material remains to be seen. But one proprietor is very keen for the venture to succeed: the *Eye* can reveal that the *Daily Mail*'s Lord Rothermere is about to pump millions of his shareholders' money into the enterprise. Addis apparently convinced young Lord Rothermere by mentioning how fond he was of his late father.

READERS of Richard Desmond's *OK!* magazine were recently treated to a spread of photos from a big party for *Ocean's 13*, attended by George Clooney and Brad Pitt.

Dirty Des and his wife Janet were also there – a fact the magazine celebrated by publishing no fewer than *four* photographs of the porn baron sharing a joke with Hollywood stars.

That should send *OK!*'s circulation – down 4 percent year on year in the last ABCs – soaring. Still, what's the point of owning a celebrity mag if you can't run pictures of yourself?

"I'VE ALWAYS known Amy Winehouse was a feisty lady, but she's going to end up in a cell next to Paris Hilton if she keeps on misbehaving," chortled the *Sun*'s Victoria Newton on 12 June.

"The *Back To Black* singer admitted she has a violent streak that comes out when she drinks – and she often uses new hubby Blake Fielder-Civil as a punch bag. The Camden Caner said: 'I'm either a really good drunk or I'm an out-and-out s***, horrible, violent, abusive, emotional drunk. I'll beat up Blake when I'm drunk. If he says one thing I don't like then I'll chin him.' I think it's about time Amy started behaving herself."

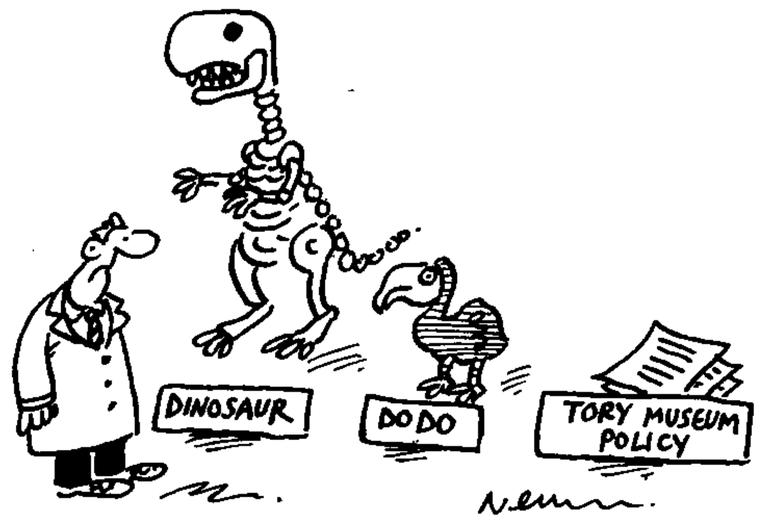
A fair point – and a brave one for Newton to make, considering that her boss, editor Rebekah Wade, was carted off to spend a night in the cells after allegedly beating up then husband Ross Kemp after a booze binge in 2005.

THE *Guardian* presses on with its campaign against the new, unacceptable face of capitalism – the private equity market. In the last month, it has led the calls for an end to tax breaks benefiting the sector and demanded tough action from Gordon Brown against those firms responsible for pension fund collapses.

Not to be outdone, the *Observer* has now got in on the act. Under the headline "Private Equity Stole Our Pensions", it highlighted the role of Apax Partners in the administration of the British United Shoe Machinery company as "perhaps one of the most vivid examples of what can go wrong". It quoted one pensions expert who claimed "that the actions of venture capitalists led directly to the failure of the scheme, and the actions of the former owners – Apax – have been immoral."

This must make grim reading for employees of the Auto Trader Group, in which Apax bought a 49 percent share three months ago. As we pointed out in *Eye* 1181, the "immoral" Apax purchased its stake from the caring, sharing Guardian Media Group, owners of the *Grauniad* and *Observer*. Which means that hacks on both titles are now in the position of campaigning against a private equity firm whose money has effectively guaranteed their financial future.

There's gratitude!



"ALL 137,500 tickets for the Glastonbury festival sold out in a record 90 minutes yesterday," reported the *Guardian*, which happens to sponsor the festival, on 2 April. And that, you might think, would be that for the 60,638,738 UK residents – at least a million of them readers of the *Guardian* – who did not buy them. But you would be wrong.

The paper referenced Glastonbury in its motoring pages on 21 April, its fashion pages on 28 April, in home news on 7 May and 28 May, and twice in one issue on 1 June (lengthy pieces in news and film and music), with further coverage in the sports section on 6 June, an arts "scoop" on 14 June, and the whole of page 3 on 18 June.

The festival proper opens this Thursday. *Guardian* readers are advised to look elsewhere for their news over the long weekend.

ANOTHER inspired hiring at the Guardian Media Group, that bastion of meritocracy and egalitarianism. A few weeks ago we revealed that *Grauniad* editor Alan Rubbisher has his daughter on the payroll; now Rubbisher's opposite number on the *Observer*, Roger Alton, has followed his lead.

The name of 16-year-old Hannah Lederer Alton, interviewing Bryan Ferry for the magazine's teen issue last Sunday, might not have meant much to readers of *Observer Music Monthly*; but subs on the paper knew they would have to treat her copy with a gentle touch.

"IT'S a mystery that has puzzled Beatles fans for four decades," enthused the *Daily Mail* on 1 June, observing that while Paul McCartney and George Harrison sported their MBEs on the sleeve of Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, John Lennon instead wore "five antique medals on his left breast. Until now, the truth about where those medals came from has eluded devotees of the band."

Hack Nick McDermott had the answer, however: "They once belonged to Major Thomas Shaw, grandfather of the 'fifth Beatle', Pete Best... A member of the 11th (Prince of Wales's Own) Bengal Lancers between 1876 and 1903, Major Shaw was awarded the Afghan War Medal and three other crosses during the two-year Second Anglo-Afghan War, which ended in 1880. He was awarded two other medals to mark the length of his service."

Well-deserved, to judge by the accompanying photograph, which showed the 1939-1945 War Medal, the 1939-1945 Defence Medal and three World War II Stars, a haul which means Major Shaw must have still been on active duty at the age of at least 79. Of the Afghan War Medal there was no sign – instead, the last of the medals pictured by the paper appeared to be... an MBE!

EXECUTIVES at *Playboy* have done some market research to find out which newspapers their readers buy when they can tear themselves away from drooling over the centrefold. One title led the field by a mile, and they are now drawing up plans for cross-promotions and other marketing campaigns using the newspaper.

The *Daily Star*, perhaps? Of course not. The throbbing news organ of choice for *Playboy* readers is... the *Daily Telegraph*.

HOW did the papers with the most lurid theories about how Pakistan cricket coach Bob Woolmer met his death react to official confirmation that he had in fact died of natural causes?

The *Daily Mail* greeted it with the headline "No murder, no poison, no fixing of matches and no resignations", blithely ignoring the fact that it was the first to float at least one of those ideas with the headline "Did match fixers want him dead?" on 22 March.

The *Daily Star* pointed out that "bungling Jamaican police have made… a humiliating U-turn", without mentioning the fact that it was accelerating rapidly away from its own certainty that "Yardies fed Bob snake venom in his bath".

The *Sun*, which had carried torrid tales of poisoned food and carrot juice and fingered the least likely suspects of all – "Al-Qaeda link to Woolmer murder" – contented itself with 80 words under the headline: "Woolmer not killed." And the *Times*, which had previously informed its readers that "more than one killer was involved" rescaled that estimate to, er, none, in a piece buried on page 37.

THE *Financial Times* threw objectivity to the winds on 2 June when it published a huge puff for the South Bank Centre by Nicholas Lander, its restaurant critic, who gushed that the financial viability of the place had been underpinned by "12 places to eat and drink around the hall", which he listed at length.

And who is the genius behind this venture? Step forward, Nicholas Lander.

The fact is that he has managed to get 12 run-of-the-mill chain restaurants, yet the *FT* allowed him more than two thirds of a page to puff his grizzly enterprise. Why should this be? The column above Lander's might provide a clue. The wine column on the *FT* is written by Jancis Robinson, aka Mrs Lander. Management at the *FT* think Robinson's wine pieces are so essential to the paper that the duo are allowed free rein to do as they wish and write what they want, even if promoting their own commercial interests.

IT'S the catfight you wish no one could win: Nirpal Dhaliwal vs Johann Hari.

After reading Dhaliwal's umpteenth article about his split from wife Liz Jones, *Indy* columnist Hari felt an uncontrollable urge to email him personally. "I see from your *Evening Standard* column that, confronted with evidence, you need to fall back on the cheap slur of implying anyone who criticises you is racist. And I love the fact that your definition of not being a misogynist is that you don't beat your wife! Hilarious. Best of luck with writing for *Grazia* – I only hope one day I can aspire to such highbrow intellectual heights! Your sneering at Liz for writing for the style magazines has somehow been reversed... If you are looking for a heifer, I suggest the mirror may be a more appropriate hunting ground."

Dhaliwal's reply scaled even more vertiginous intellectual heights: "i don't think you're a racist babe. i think you're the hottest momma going. shit, i wish i was gay just so i could jerk off thinking about your big fat tits... man, no wonder you were depressed. if i looked like a blob of cold porridge, i'd be pretty fucked up too."

Boys! *Boys!*

"MUCH of the job of the foreign correspondent – or this one, anyway – is to copy out the papers of the country he's reporting from," Harry Mount reveals in the *Spectator*.

"This is completely standard practice," he adds, boasting that one article he wrote last year was a "complete plagiarisation" of a story from the Fox News website.

Might this confession at last explain why Mount was recently sacked as New York correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*?

HACKWATCH

Bryony Gordon

FOR OLDER readers of the *Daily Telegraph*, each day's paper is a dauntingly unfamiliar challenge. What is a podcast? Is it safe to "download" Simon Heffer? Why are there no pictures of Liz Hurley? And, most bafflingly: who on earth is this Bryony Gordon who keeps turning up in the Bill Deedes slot on the op-ed page?

Most probably assume she's a Craig Brown parody of a witless witterer, but Bryony really exists. The daughter of former *Sunday Mirror* columnist Jane Gordon, she did a stint as a 3am Girl on the *Daily Mirror* in 2002 but packed it in after two months, complaining that she was "burned out" at the ripe old age of 21. Rescue was at hand with the offer of a job at the *Telegraph* – where, by happy coincidence, her aunt Sue Ryan was managing editor.

The question "Who she?" is easily answered. But this leaves an insoluble poser: "*Why* she?"

12 April: Bryony is appalled to read that lots of her twentysomething contemporaries are moving back in with their parents – "which makes me want to say, ohmygawdlike grow up". Youngsters who can't find a flat of their own are lazy and pathetic. "Of course, as a middle-class media gadabout being paid at least .000000087 pence an hour, it is easy for me to pontificate…" Ain't it just?

26 April: Boffins have discovered another earth-like planet, 20 light years away. "Nanoo, nanoo! Who would have thought it? Not me, that's for sure." But then, as she concedes, Bryony finds it hard enough to comprehend that the world doesn't revolve around her, let alone entertain the possibility that there are other worlds. Maybe on the other planet some wittering hackette is writing a column "about the fact that there is some poor girl on a place called Earth writing for the *Daily Telegraph*". Or maybe not.

3 May: A newspaper article claims that the pace of life in cities is faster than it was 10 years ago. "I read this piece about pace of life some time around 10am. I say some time around 10am, but I cannot be sure as I do not own a watch. But it was definitely several hours after everybody else, or maybe several hours before – I can never be sure if people are too busy to read papers nowadays. If the latter is the case, good afternoon…" And so on, exhaustingly, for another 650 words.

10 May: Bryony rejoices at Nicolas Sarkozy's victory in the presidential election. "Zut alors! Mon dieu! Sacré bleu!" Having thus established her credentials as a commentator on French politics, she reveals that she supported Sarko because of his wife. "Cecilia is the kind of person every woman wants to be like and every man wants to be with… I wonder if the voters were rather enamoured by her too." Well, it's a thought.

17 May: Bryony poked someone last week. "Before you choke on your cornflakes, let me explain… What poking means in today's online socially networked society is that I sent him a virtual greeting on the website Facebook." But before Sir Herbert Gussett rushes to join the fun, Bryony has a word of warning: "I am done with social networking sites." They're full of vacuous twittering and "ohmigod wasn't last night amazing?" messages which could just as well be emailed instead – or indeed saved for a *Telegraph* column.

24 May: "I don't, as a rule, hate that many things." But there's one breed of people Bryony detests. It may be daringly heretical, but she hates… estate agents! "I hate them because, when you are stupid enough to view a flat through them, as I was a few months ago, they then bombard you with phone calls to tell you about another property you will really like…" Who'd have guessed it?

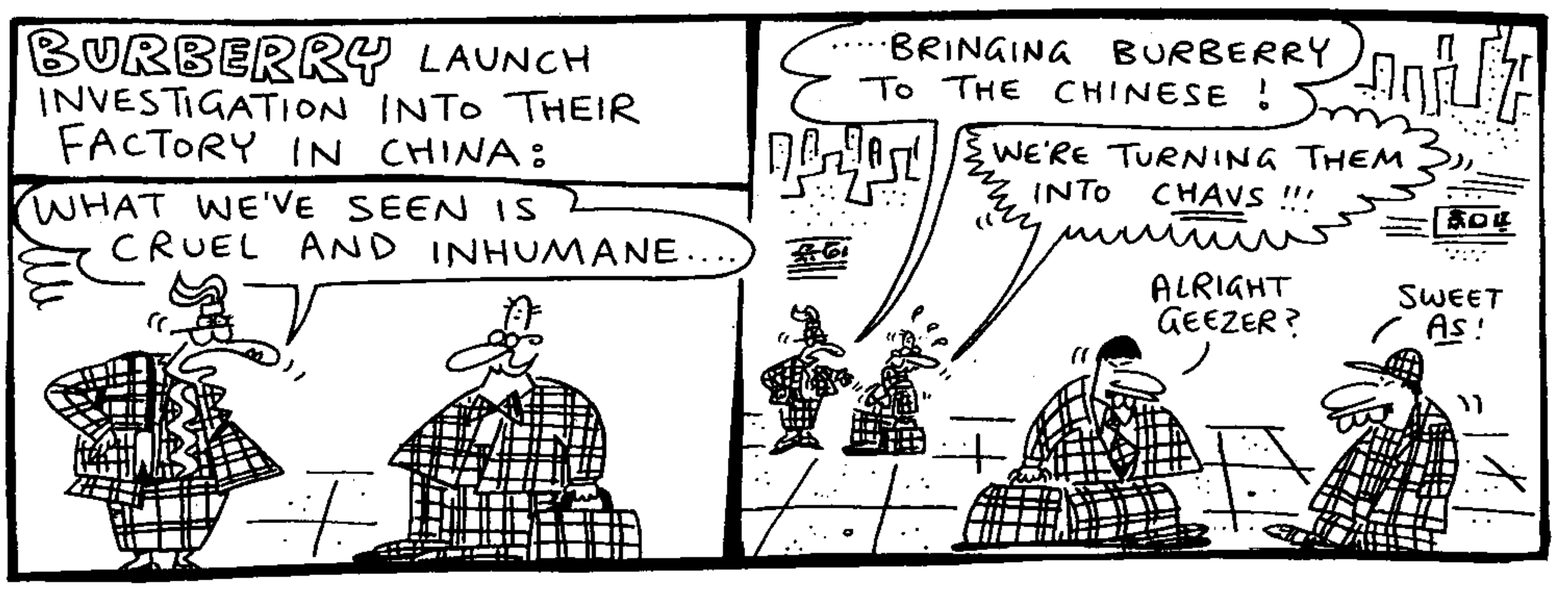
31 May: At a church wedding last weekend, Bryony recognised the young vicar as someone she'd once met at a party. "I was stunned by this. Truly stunned." Until now, she assumed that "all people under the age of 50 who embrace religion are either reformed drug addicts, or terrorists, or child abusers. The vicar was none of these things. The vicar was fun and amusing and liked a drink. The vicar was normal." This revelation, which she feels obliged to share with *Telegraph* readers, is nothing less than "an epiphany… I am beginning to think there might be something in this faith thing."

7 June: "I wrote this column several hours before *Diana – The Witnesses in the Tunnel* was broadcast, so I haven't seen it. On principle, I won't have seen it by the time you read this article, either." As Bryony reveals, she doesn't watch much television anyway as she's always out at parties. Nevertheless, Channel 4 should be ashamed of itself for broadcasting trash. Take *Big Brother* – which, she has heard, is full of "grasping 18-year-old girls" who have been persuaded by C4 "that there is nothing more honourable in life than arguing about hair straighteners on camera". Trashy indeed: can't they aspire to an honourable job such as navel-gazing in the *Daily Telegraph*?

14 June: Bryony is pleased that Lord Justice Richards has been cleared of flashing. "Most blokes I know would crumble if they had to flash their grubby pants in court. But not Sir Stephen." He has, however, raised an important issue: are Calvin Klein briefs a bit flashy for a man of 56? She decides to postpone the discussion about appropriate underwear for men of a certain age – "that's a whole other column". Yes, we feared it might be. Next week, perhaps?

SUPERMODELS

KERBER


BURBERRY LAUNCH INVESTIGATION INTO THEIR FACTORY IN CHINA:
WHAT WE'VE SEEN IS CRUEL AND INHUMANE....
....BRINGING BURBERRY TO THE CHINESE !
WE'RE TURNING THEM INTO CHAVS !!!
ALRIGHT GEEZER?
SWEET AS!

OVERHEARD at the black-tie Tory dinner marking the 25th anniversary of the Falklands War, attended by Lady Thatcher and other Tory grandees: "Here's to free trade in negroes!"

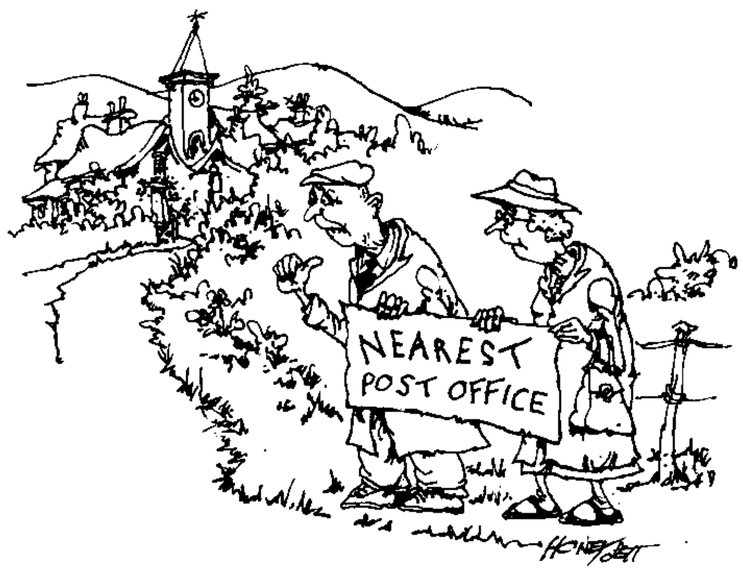
No prizes for guessing the speaker: drunken *Indie* columnist Bruce "the Brute" Anderson. The Brute proceeded to complain to anyone who would listen about David Cameron's mistake in giving too much attention to "the three Ws" – wogs, women and woofters.

THE Conservatives' industry spokesman Alan Duncan angrily denounced the closure of Post Office branches in Parliament claiming it would lead to the "near-certain death of the village post office".

Perhaps he should have directed his ire at colleague Oliver Letwin, the man in charge of Cameron's policy review. In his spare time Letwin is a non-executive director for NM Rothschild Corporate Finance, whose current business includes "ongoing" work advising on the "£2.8bn restructuring and funding by government of the Post Office network".

Letwin's spokesman denied that either he or Rothschilds had a role in advising on the closures, but when the *Eye* made calls to the Conservatives, the Post Office and Rothschilds asking for a fuller explanation, answer came their none.

PS: The adaptable frontbencher presented a petition in Parliament last December from his West Dorset constituents demanding the government maintain the rural Post Office network. Did he find time to pass on their views to colleagues on the board?



CALLED TO ORDURE

PARLIAMENT was given two fingers by Whitehall during the run up to the Brussels summit. So much for all the fine talk from Gordon Brown and Co about the Commons being given greater sway!

The summit, which starting just after this Eye went to press, may result in a form of EU constitution. A controversial matter, without doubt. Yet MPs were treated with amazing disdain. Europe Minister Geoff Hoon pulled out of a hearing at the last minute and his boss, Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett, repeatedly told MPs she would not disclose the government's policy. Old Politburo Beckett was so informative she might as well have said "nyet, nyet, nyet".

Since demotion to the Europe job Hoon has often given the impression of being underworked.

Yet the foreign affairs select committee found it hard to pin down a date when he might explain the government's preparations for Brussels.

The committee had originally asked the Foreign Secretary to appear but was told to get lost. Hoon played hard to get, offering a date when the committee would be away in Russia. The chairman, a normally loyal Labour man called Mike Gapes, was so angry he sent the Foreign Office a letter of reprimand and posted it on the committee's website. This infuriated Hoon, who buttonholed one of the committee's Labour members, Andrew Mackinlay, and complained bitterly. Mackinlay told him to grow up.

Finally a time was agreed for Hoon to give evidence – only for him to cancel shortly before the event. Beckett did finally agree to go in front of the committee, but only 24 hours before the summit began. By then, as Gapes argued, negotiating positions at the summit had "effectively been made and the opportunity for parliament to influence the decisions had passed".

Another Commons outfit, the European scrutiny committee, was slightly more successful. It did manage to grab Beckett a fortnight before the summit (albeit at the "dead" hour of 4pm on a Thursday). Not that the old boot said much.

The scrutiny committee is chaired by Labour's Michael Connarty, whose buccaneering approach is a model for future committee chiefs. With Beckett sitting before him, face like a sucked lemon, Connarty accused her of "non-transparency" and of trying to "fob off" MPs. "I hear what you say," said Beckett robotically, before proceeding to stick to her policy of total non-disclosure.

She insisted that the government had not been conducting secret negotiations with other countries about an EU constitution. "This is a frozen debate," she said. "There is nothing on the table."

Really? Just a few days later Tory MP James Gray asked Tony Blair at Prime Minister's Questions if there had been negotiations with France's President Sarkosy. Blair: "Obviously, we are trying in advance of the summit to gain allies and to coordinate positions." Hmmn. Did Beckett know this? If so, she may just have lied to parliament.

Back at the European scrutiny committee, the Lib Dems' Richard Younger-Ross thought he heard Beckett use the term "meaningful negotiations". Beckett replied with a classic example of foreign policy speak: "If I did use the word 'meaningful' I did not mean it to carry any significance at all, I assure you." She said that if she gave away her thoughts on the EU constitution she might reduce her "negotiating space".

Connarty wondered if the governing elite of Europe was trying to establish a constitution "behind a Chinese wall". Or even "a new Berlin wall". Beckett insisted that she did not know what was "on the table".

Veteran Tory Eurosceptic Bill Cash barked: "It's a joke. You do not even know as Foreign Secretary what is going on."

Beckett: "It is not that I do not know what is going on. It is because nothing is going on."

Cash: "You do not know what is going on."

Beckett: "There is nothing going on."

Cash: "Astonishing! You have come here to discuss these matters."

Beckett: "I came here because you asked me to come and give evidence. If you had asked me whether there was very much I could tell you I could have told you no before I came here."

Cash: "Amazing!"

Connarty wondered what had happened to the "Sherpas" (foreign ministry officials from EU countries who before a summit will meet to agree an agenda). Not that they are now called Sherpas. They are now termed "focal points". Connarty: "I'm not sure who has changed the English language but the focal points, I believe, are human beings. What are they discussing?"

Beckett: "Not very much."

Cash: "It's a mad hatter's tea party."

Thus, in the year 2007, is parliament kept informed about the efforts government ministers are making to protect our national sovereignty.

'Gavel Basher'

CONSULTATION with the public over new nuclear power stations may have been "misleading, seriously flawed, manifestly inadequate and procedurally unfair" according to the high court, but energy companies have had no difficulty getting their views heard at the highest levels of government.

Senior executives from the energy company EDF met officials at the Department for Trade and Industry once a month last year to discuss new nuclear power, according to documents released under the Freedom of Information Act and Environmental Information Regulations.

The documents reveal that secretary of state Alistair Darling attended some of the meetings but the DTI refuses to reveal what was discussed, who else was present or release any minutes – even though it admits that "consideration of industry views on nuclear policy has been key in helping to influence government thinking on nuclear policy".

PS: The government's enthusiasm for nuclear power could be seen in the Queen's birthday honours list which featured the name of one Robert Armour, company secretary of British Energy. Armour is in charge of the firm's public relations and government lobbying, and with fellow executives he led British Energy into a financial collapse that required a multi million pound bail out by the taxpayer. His reward? An OBE!

THE Queen's birthday honours were strangely light on the usual gang of arms makers, overpaid executives and PFI profiteers – so hats off to Paul Lester, chief executive of the VT Group, who was given a CBE for being all three.

The £695,000-a-year boss has good reason to be grateful to Labour. His firm, formerly known as Vosper Thornycroft, is already doing well with military private finance initiatives and education contracts, and now stands to make millions from Labour's proposed replacement for Trident.

Labour in turn must be grateful his company offers a retirement plan for clapped-out politicians: it now employs former education minister Baroness Blackstone as a director.

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

SO MUCH for European Union solidarity and members' attempts to shore up surveillance of its sea borders.

Discussions in the mid-1990s led nowhere, and an eventual plan to create a fleet of 115 boats, 23 aircraft and 25 helicopters to provide patrols and rescue unfortunate illegal migrants thrown into the sea from un-seaworthy vessels has been completely fumbled by mandarins.

At the last count the EU had mustered only one tenth of the fleet, and migrants continue to risk life and limb to enter the EU by sea. Malta has several boatloads turning up on a daily basis, while 7,000 migrants have reached the Canary Islands so far this year. How many drowned on the way is not known.

It took a public furore over the plight of 27 Africans who spent three days clinging to tuna nets (while Malta and Libya argued over who should rescue them) for European governments to decide to take action. And this was after years of earnest working papers and empty words from Franco Frattini, European commissioner for justice, freedom and security, about the "European team spirit" and its "courageous political initiatives". EU "solidarity" has never looked shakier.

EU-phemisms

Up yours Joe Public

GERMANY, current holder of the EU presidency and an enthusiast for harmonising EU criminal law, has not been playing the game when it comes to European Arrest Warrants.

The notorious warrants force member states to arrest and dispatch suspects wanted in other states without the possible political interference of old-style extradition proceedings. They were pushed through without proper debate by MEPs or member state parliaments, and last May the European Court of Justice upheld the right of EU states to arrest citizens without showing prima facie evidence against them.

Germany, however, used a legal technicality to avoid extraditing a former Nazi war criminal, Soren Kam, to Denmark in February (Kam was implicated in a murder in German-occupied Denmark in 1943). And last year it refused to extradite alleged Al-Qaeda funder Mamoun Darkanzanli to Spain after his indictment in the Madrid bombings, on the pretext that the European Arrest Warrant violated the German constitution.

But while Germany, Italy, Poland, Cyprus and the Czech Republic all questioned this way of extraditing their citizens, the British government agreed to the warrants, by-passed the House of Lords and rejected an amendment by Scottish nationalist MEP and law professor Sir Neil MacCormack for a "European habeus corpus" to counter over-zealous or corrupt magistrates. If Britain loses its veto on justice and home affairs at this month's EU summit, the Eurogendarmerie will gain even more power.

FERAL FOOTNOTES

IN HIS speech on the media last week, Tony Blair mused that "the purpose of the series of speeches that I have given over the past year has been deliberately reflective, to get beyond the immediate headlines or issues of the day". In that spirit, the *Eye* offers some background material as a context for his remarks.

"In my own case I introduced: first, Lobby briefings on the record; then published the minutes; then gave monthly press conferences; then freedom of information; then became the first Prime Minister to go to the Select Committee's Chairman session; and so on. None of it to any avail."

Quite true. Briefings went on the record in 1997, though they were anonymous and it wasn't until several years later that journalists were allowed to admit it was Alastair Campbell who gave them.

As for monthly press conferences and appearances in front of the Commons Liaison Committee, they did not arrive until June 2002 – coincidentally, just after Stephen Byers was forced to resign in a row over spin and Blair had been accused of trying to get himself a bigger role at the Queen Mother's funeral. It was also contemporaneous with David Blunkett denouncing the media as "almost on the edge of insanity" and John Reid accusing the *Telegraph* and *Mail* groups of "character assassination".

As for his monthly conferences, the prime minister usually prefers to invite questions from overseas hacks, ensuring a less hostile reception than he would get from lobby correspondents. Oh, and Blair's most recent comment on Freedom of Information was to break his policy of silence on efforts to restrict scrutiny of MPs by telling David Winnick MP on 6 June that "if I were pushed to, I might disagree" that the bill "should be thrown in the bin".

O·B·N

"You are undoubtedly one of the nicest people ever to lead this country.

– Tony Wright MP to Tony Blair, Commons Liaison Committee, 18 June

Number crunchings

£700 ■ Cash given by Cabinet ministers for Queen's 80th birthday present

£1,700 ■ Cash given by Cabinet ministers for Tony Blair and John Prescott's leaving presents

£6,000 ■ Cash given by taxpayers for Lord Levy's Foreign Office leaving party

GORDON IN BAGHDAD

Down on the Farm

THE scandal of the shambles Defra made over failing to pay farmers their EU subsidies rolls inexorably on and we are now beginning to see some of its nastier repercussions.

Readers may recall that one upshot of the greatest single act of maladministration by any government department since foot-and-mouth was that the EU imposed a succession of fines on the British government so far totalling £350m. Brussels can scarcely have believed its luck at such a windfall. But a furious Gordon Brown told Defra there was no way he was going to bail it out for a disaster entirely of its own making. It would have to pay the bill out of its departmental budget, making enough cuts to cover the deficit. Being Defra it did not, of course, suggest cuts in its own army of penpushers. Instead it looked round the more inoffensive and useful outlying parts of its mighty empire, to see where it could slice off a few million here and a few million there in the hope no one would notice.

One place where its feral gaze alighted was the responsibility of the Environment Agency for Britain's flood defences. Who would notice a cut of £15m off that budget (apart from all those people whose homes may be flooded as a result)? Another target was the British Waterways Board, responsible for our 2,400 mile-long canal system, which in recent years has become a considerable success story, providing recreation for ever more millions of people seeking a peaceful escape from the horrors of Blair's Britain as they drift down the canals in barges or walk their dogs along the towpath.

The BWB was told that, to pay for Defra's incompetence over those non-payments to farmers, its spending over the next five years would be cut by £50m. This hit BWB in the solar plexus, because it already had a very tight budget. It was immediately obvious that this would mean postponing all sorts of desirable and necessary items in its programme, such as repairing crumbling canal banks to stop water pouring out over the countryside. But as the months went by it became obvious that even worse was to come. The BWB has had to lay off 180 of its staff, most of whom, unlike their masters in Defra, were actually doing useful work.

It has now been reported that the board is having to postpone its most ambitious current project, the reconstruction of the Cotswold Canals joining the Thames in the east of England with the Severn in the west. This is a particularly painful blow, since the BWB had already raised nearly £18m in funding from other bodies, including £11.9m pledged by the National Lottery Fund which it may now lose thanks to the project being put on ice.

Worst of all there is now talk that Defra plans to sell off the entire canal system to raise a further £1bn. Canal users view this as a total disaster, since it would almost certainly be sold off piecemeal to assorted developers, few of whom would have much interest in retaining a working canal system. Altogether the price other people are now having to pay for Defra's shameful incompetence is beginning to look alarming.

'Muckspreader'

"Anyway, I'd better go... customer waiting"

ME TV

Let Me Entertain You (BBC2)
Britain's Got Talent (ITV1)

THE television talent show, which seemed a dead genre a decade back, has recently staged a comeback as unlikely as Barbra Streisand's announcement that she was following her much-advertised "retirement tour" with another one.

But shows such as *The X-Factor*, *Pop Idol* and *How Do You Solve A Problem Like Maria?* were tightly-focused musical searches, seeking someone capable of recording a chart hit or holding down the lead in a West End musical. There seemed no room for the old generalist auditions – *Opportunity Knocks* or *New Faces* – in which the future Victoria Wood or Bobby Crush would compete with geezers who played the spoons on their knees or people doing bad take-offs of Frank Spencer. Now, though, the Butlin's end-of-week free-for-all is back on TV and we can only say, as those desperate impressionists used to: oooh Betty!

Let Me Entertain You, a BBC2 tea-time show, is more or less the reincarnation of *Opportunity Knocks*, down to the fact that the only excuse for host Brian Conley's cheesy performance is that he's ironically chanelling Hughie Greene. In a grey suit and striped viyella tie, wearing hair that looks bought rather than grown, Conley jumps out of a Rolls in dark glasses and jogs into the studio while crooning "Power of Love."

Various acts are then brought on stage, including two gawky kids who do a gymanastic routine to "Rockin' Robin", a soul singer who "came very close to a recording contract" in the 1960s and elderly twins in red shirts whose routine seems to consist of slapping each others' faces before playing the spoons.

The exact nature of their act remains a mystery because viewers only got to see 34 seconds of it. Because this is the age of television cruelty, in which *Big Brother* house-mates are chosen for the likelihood that they might make each other cry, there's no truck with that old *Opportunity Knocks* and *New Faces* nonsense of letting the performer reach the end of the routine before their dreams are ruined. The audience all have key-pads on which they express their view of the contestants. When studio hostility reaches the level of 50 percent, an electronic raspberry blows them off-stage.

A similar viciousness fills ITV1's **Britain's Got Talent**, a Simon Cowell spin-off from *Pop Idol* and *The X-Factor*, in which the twist is that it isn't only singing that the contestants can't do. Although the famously nice Ant & Dec are employed up front as a veneer of sympathy, the judges each have a buzzer which allows them to vote against an act at any time during its progress, their dislike dramatised by a large flashing X. Once all three are activated, the slot is stopped. And this gladiatorial tone is exacerbated by the fact that Cowell has selected to sit alongside him on the panel the only other British TV performer who comes close to matching him for unjustified self-regard and lack of natural camera presence: Piers Moron.

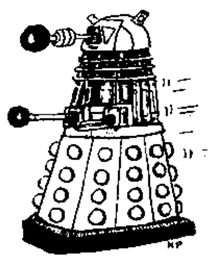
With Amanda Holden sitting between them as the unfortunate garnish in their ham-and-cheese sandwich, they deliver prescripted put-downs to acts which have been invited to perform purely to provide them with an opportunity for one-liners. Even their occasional supportive lines are structured to play on the grumpiness the audience are assumed to love them for: "Fleur, I'm afraid I have very bad news for you..." – ten-second pause – "...you're going to have to do all this again in the semi-final!"

While ITV1 certainly wouldn't be caught rigging the thing so soon after the quiz show scandals, some of the judges' positions seem conveniently dramatic.

Big Brother may be a blood-sport, but its young contestants are trading humiliation for the reasonable chance of a brief media career. This new wave of talent shows is deliberately putting on TV hopeless acts who have no chance of anything except being laughed at by a national TV audience. In a talent show for talent shows, this lot would be voted out in the first round.

'Remote Controller'

BIRTSPEAK 2.0



"An Information Architect works closely with Designers, Client-Side Developers, Software Engineers, editorial staff, and business stakeholders within BBC Audio & Music Interactive as well as across other BBC Groups, to develop exceptional user experiences on all our services, products and platforms. Information Architects simultaneously drive user-centred interaction design & user-centred content/data design for our products and services on all platforms."

– Job description, BBC

CITIZEN JOURNALIST OF THE WEEK

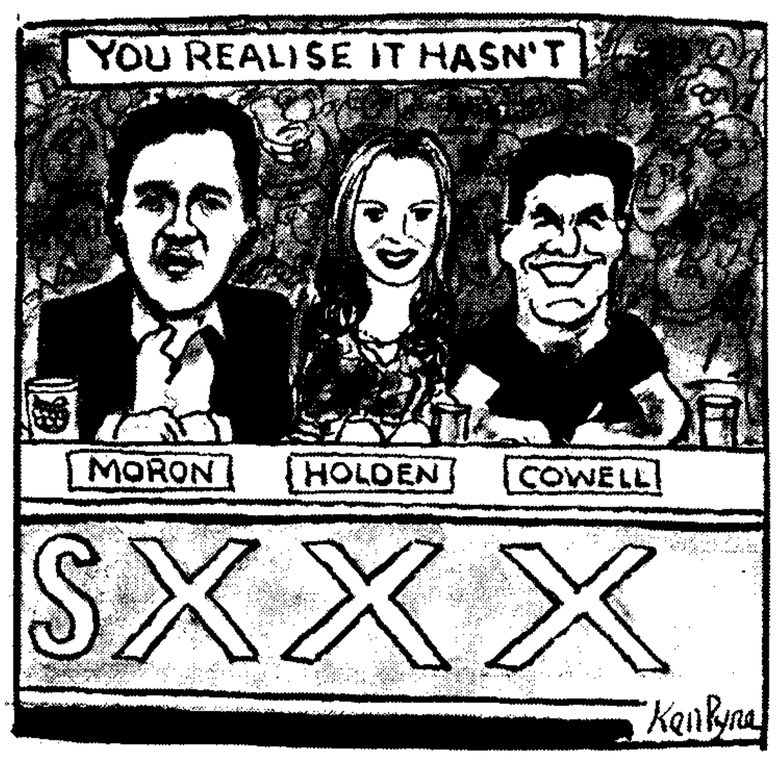
Sam Mason, presenter: And now we go to Sean in Bristol. Sean, can you sum up the weather where you are in one word?

Sean: Cunt!

– BBC Radio Bristol, 13 June

QUOTE OF THE YEAR

"I admit I was wrong." – *Piers Morgan, ITV, 17 June 2007. Alas, he was confessing only to underrating two juggling barmen from Manchester in* Britain's Got Talent.



DUMB BRITAIN

6Music

Nemone: In which battle was Lord Horatio Nelson fatally wounded?
Caller: The Battle of Hastings.

BBC Radio Scotland

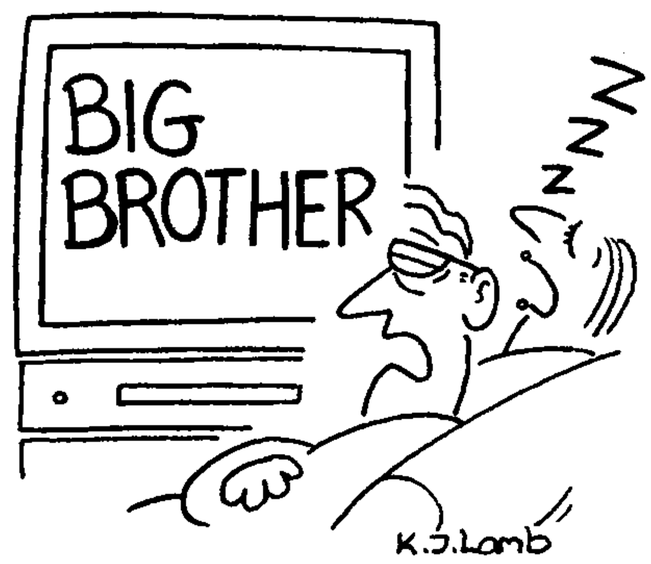
Fred MacAuley: What date was the Great Fire of London?
Caller: 1066.

Century FM

Presenter: Here's question two, for £20. The Great Fire of London occurred in 1966. True or false?
Caller: I'll go true.

The Weakest Link

Anne Robinson: What was the name of the otter in the novel by Henry Williamson?
Contestant: Dave.



"The N-word, the F-word, the Zzzzzz-word..."

TONY BLAIR's choice of Reuters' London HQ as the venue for his anti-media speech made plain his affection for the news agency – or perhaps for its CEO, Tom Glocer.

The ultra-smooth Glocer is as far from a cynical hack as you can get. Introducing Blair to the audience, he gushed about how "impressed" he had been by "the power of Tony Blair's political convictions" and how he had made Britain "a beacon for democracy and openness".

Can he really be describing the country that closed a Serious Fraud Office inquiry into BAE System's slush fund?

MOTORING presenter Quentin Willson went full throttle in ITV1's *Confessions of a Traffic Warden*, broadcast on 4 June, dubbing parking enforcers "hyenas" and declaring that "next to executioners, terrorists and car dealers they have to be the least trusted profession in the UK".

This must have delighted the traffic wardens of Westminster, who receive their training in loading restrictions from a video presentation entitled *Keep it Moving*, presented (in return for a generous corporate fee) by one Quentin Willson.

HOW JOURNALISM WORKS

THE BBC News website features links on its home pages to its "most read" and "most emailed" stories which, depressingly for the corporation's more serious-minded hacks, tend to be tales of sex with goats, over-sized condoms and *Big Brother* contestants, many of them dating back several years.

On 14 June a hoary old tale from February 2005 topped the list: the jailing of Liverpudlian Amanda Monti for ripping off her ex-boyfriend's testicle and attempting to eat it.

That afternoon the *Daily Mirror*'s website had an exciting exclusive: "A SPURNED woman ripped off her ex-boyfriend's testicle with her bare hands and attempted to swallow it, a court heard today…"

WORLD OF SPORT

"IT'S pleasant to be elected without voices against me," Sepp Blatter boasted two weeks ago after being elected unopposed to a third term as president of FIFA, world football's arthritic governing body.

Actually there have been plenty of voices raised against Blatter, mostly protesting about bribery and corruption involving FIFA officials. He generally turns a deaf ear, but even Blatter can't ignore US district court judge Loretta A. Preska, who is refereeing between MasterCard and Visa over who gets to sponsor the World Cup.

The trouble began last year when FIFA sold exclusive rights to Visa – even though MasterCard, the official sponsor since 1990, had a contract with FIFA giving it first claim on sponsorship rights for the next tournament.

In a judgment last December, Preska found that FIFA had broken its contractual obligations to MasterCard. FIFA, she said, "lied repeatedly to MasterCard" by promising its right of first-refusal would be honoured – and then "lied to Visa" by assuring them that MasterCard had no incumbency rights. "While the FIFA witnesses at trial boldly characterised their breaches as 'white lies', 'commercial lies', 'bluffs' and, ironically, 'the game', their internal emails discuss the 'different excuses to give to MasterCard as to why the deal wasn't done with them', 'how we (as FIFA) can still be seen as having at least some business ethics' and how to 'make the whole fuck-up look better for FIFA'." FIFA appealed, but a federal circuit court of appeals has sent the case back to Preska.

Whatever the outcome, Blatter's gang of spivs will likely have to shell out hefty compensation. "It is going to cost us a pretty penny," Blatter admitted to FIFA members. But, he reassured them, "it will not cost anything to you. We will get it somewhere." Er, where exactly?

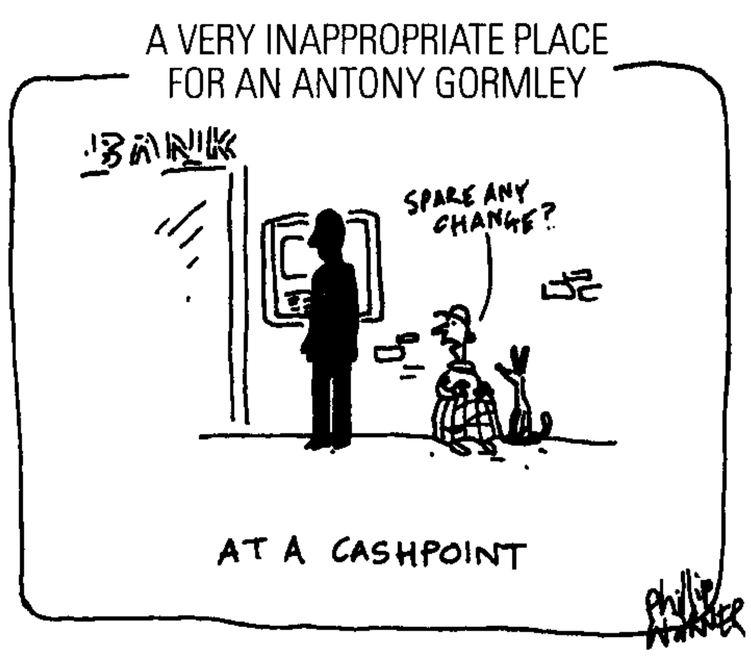
New Olympic Logo

DOES the London 2012 Olympics team have no shame?

After the outcry over its catastrophic logo launch, its "Work in Progress" weblog was flooded with criticism. However, most of the negative comments were censored, leaving just a handful of people of questionable taste to praise the jiggling pink monstrosity as "alive" and "energetic".

How did the committee defend such a whitewash? Apparently the criticism only reflected "the tenor of negative comments found elsewhere on the web... Rather than act as an echo chamber we have published a selection here that say something a little different."

It seems the London team has learnt a lot from its trips to Beijing…



JIHAD LATEST

ED HUSAIN is the first British Muslim to join the Islamist far right, revel in its conspiracy theories and hatreds and, when he'd seen sense, produce an exposé. Publication of *The Islamist* has made him many enemies – but not just among his former militant friends.

The British left may be just as embarrassed. Husain points out repeatedly how the Labour government, liberal media and supposedly anti-fascist leftists have helped movements that stand for pretty much everything they purport to be against.

Husain broke with the gentle Islam of his parents as a teenager and joined the East London Mosque in Whitechapel. Members of Jamat-e-Islami, the south Asian sister organisation of the Muslim Brotherhood, immersed him in the thoughts of its founder Abul Ala Mawdudi, who told disciples to build an Islamic state that "seeks to mould every aspect of life" as fascism and communism had done. Also on the syllabus was Sayd Qutb, whose doctrine that the pagan world must be cleansed by religious fury inspires the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, al-Qa'eda and its imitators.

Before he released *The Islamist*, Husain went back to the East London Mosque. In the bookshop: "I bought an updated copy of Qutb's *Milestones*, published not in Riyadh but in Birmingham… with chapter headings such as 'The Virtues of killing a non-believer,' and ideas such as 'Attacking the non-believers in their territories is a collective and individual duty'. Just as I had done as a 16 year old, hundreds of young Muslims are buying these books from Islamist mosques in Britain and imbibing the idea that killing non-believers is not only acceptable but the duty of a good Muslim."

Husain was dumbfounded that a Labour government was subsidising the expansion of the East London Mosque and that Prince Charles appeared willing to open its new educational centre.

He also wonders why the supposedly left-wing Socialist Workers Party had allied with Jamat to propel the supposedly left-wing "Gorgeous" George Galloway to power in the East End, even though in Jamat's native Bangladesh Jamat's divinely-inspired goons terrorise genuinely left-wing Bengalis.

"I wrote *The Islamist* knowing that I would be removing the masks of those who, until very recently, were walking in and out of Downing Street masquerading as moderate Muslims," Husain continued. He remembers sitting with Inayat Bungawala, of the Muslim Council of Britain, as a Hamas supporter poured out his hatred of Jews. "Neither Inayat nor myself questioned any of this," he says. "Jew bashing was an acceptable part of the Islamist curriculum."

He notices that the chairman of the East London Mosque, Abdul Bari, "a lifelong admirer of Mawdudi and public host of several leaders of Jamat-e-Islami from Bangladesh" now heads the MCB, while his predecessor, Iqbal Sacranie, was given a knighthood by Blair despite having opined that death was "perhaps too easy" for Salman Rushdie.

Although Labour ministers are stopping their appeasement of the MCB, the BBC and *Channel 4 News* never say whether MCB leaders are supporters of Jamat or the Muslim Brotherhood or what, precisely, Jamat and the Muslim Brotherhood believe. Journalists who would never accept Nick Griffin as a spokesman for Britain's "whites" accept the religious right as the legitimate voice of British Islam.

Husain moved from the mosque to Hizb ut-Tahrir, which is banned across the world because of its calls for a jihad to create a theocratic empire, but is free to operate in Britain. "Today the call to jihad is heard more or less daily by large segments of British Muslim youth," he says, "but at the time this was extreme rhetoric."

You might think those who want a religious tyranny would be easy for liberals to oppose. Not so. After jihad came to Britain in dreadful fashion on 7 July 2005, it was the liberal *Guardian* that downplayed the atrocity. Dilpazier Aslam, a *Guardian* trainee and Hizb member, said its readers had to understand that funky second- and third-generation Muslims "were much sassier with our opinions, not caring if the boat rocks or not". The *Grauniad* later fired Aslam, but its website still carries podcasts of Hizb leaders, while its comment pages are every Muslim Brotherhood apologist's favourite read.

The paper is exploiting a growing market. A Channel 4 poll this month showed 24 percent of Muslims believed the four men identified as the bombers were not responsible for the attacks (even though they had produced "martyrdom videos", saying that – er – they were responsible). There will be plenty more where that came from, concludes Husain, unless the British "willingness to turn a blind eye, avoid a fuss and hope that somehow it will work out" ends, and ends quickly.

'Ratbiter'

AD NAUSEAM

"THIS must not be about PR or about looking good because of consumer expectations," was NFU president Peter Kendall's call to supermarkets on the subject of local sourcing at this year's NFU conference.

Last issue we noted how Sainsbury's had responded with… an ad campaign. A fortnight later, however, and Kendall's plea that supermarkets pay fair prices to farmers appears to have sparked precisely the opposite response to the one he wanted – a PR epidemic.

Following Sainsbury's Jamie Oliver-led burst, Asda has now launched a second instalment of its fly-on-the-wall campaign. This time Victoria Wood is replaced by comedian Paul Whitehouse. Where Victoria was having a whale of a time in the bakery, Paul's in the milk section. Needless to say, one of the spots features Whitehouse joshing merrily with Asda's happy, happy farmers.

Not to be outdone, Tesco is pushing its sourcing credentials, with what sounds suspiciously like another PR stunt – a scheme that offers small farms who don't supply Tesco the chance to sell their produce in local stores. Quite what impact this will have on the rural economy is unclear, but Tesco is keen to make a lot of noise about it. Once again, friendly, approachable stars are mobilised to show how friendly and approachable these corporate behemoths are. In this case, Martin Clunes promises Faye Ripley some fresh milk one morning on a camping trip, and after a hilarious run in with a ruminant, he ends up at Tesco in his pyjamas.

It's particularly ironic that both Asda and Tesco should have chosen milk as their latest vehicle for self-promotion, when Kendall's speech picked out the British dairy sector as being "in meltdown" because of the prices set by the supermarkets.

CLICHÉ-STAN

"The next Middle Eastern peace plan will have to be a three-state solution: Israel, Hamastan and Fatahland. Did I say three? I meant four. Because no peace could last long if it didn't somehow end the threat to Israel posed by Hezbollahstan." – Niall Ferguson, ***Sunday Telegraph***

"Dispatches from Blogistan: A Travel Guide for the Modern Blogger by Suzanne Stefanac" – ***book title***

"Welcome to Rich-istan, the land of the new rich" – ***Sunday Times***

"Bizzare-istan" – *headline in* ***Christianity Today*** *magazine*

MEDICINEBALLS

Brown study

WHAT should Gordon Brown do with the NHS? He may want to put his "unique stamp" on it, but Blairites are working around the clock before he takes over to progress the market reforms beyond the point of no return.

The great con of Blair's NHS was to preach the rhetoric of patient power while handing over control, and a vast sum of public money, to the private sector. To argue that this is not privatisation of the NHS is nonsense, but then Blair excelled at that.

The tipping point for the NHS will come if "new" Labour pushes through its plans to outsource up to £64bn worth of commissioning to American firms such as United Health and Kaiser Permanente. This would suit Blair's friends at McKinsey, who can charge a fortune to the NHS for brokering the deals and also represent many of the US companies who stand to gain. At least one senior executive at McKinsey has a staff pass at the Department of Health. In return, Blair will have ample boot-filling opportunities in America.

In Blair's absence, Health Secretary Patsy Hewitt is rushing through his agenda before her exit, aided by David "Nibbler" Nicholson, the surprise choice as NHS chief executive, who leapt up the shortlist after a meeting with Blairite health guru Professor Paul Corrigan. Nicholson in turn has appointed an NHS management team that is putting intense pressure on strategic health authorities and primary care trusts to outsource their commissioning. The idea that PCTs will retain ultimate control (and hence keep the NHS public) is a myth.

So what is Brown to do? Clearly a return to old Labour Stalinism of diktat by bureaucracy is impossible. And yet Blair's model is equally didactic, suggesting market competition is the only way forward and peppering it with promises of choice, when patients only get to choose what the government (or United Health) wants them to. The junior doctor selection crisis is the most extreme example of this – thousands of doctors who have worked for seven years or more in the NHS are allowed only one choice of job, in many cases only specifying a region (eg Scotland) rather than a hospital unit. Stalin invented the internal market, the Tories introduced it to the NHS and Blair is polishing it to imperfection.

The NHS works because it is a one-stop shop – once you're in it, you get all the care you need. Contrast this to America, where patients who have brain tumours removed are sent home the next day if their insurance package does not include continuing care. If American-managed care corporations unleash their "expertise" on the NHS, only an American system can result. Profitable patients are cherry-picked while unprofitable patients are dumped.

Brown must reverse this without seeming to be "old" Labour. The solution is to deliver what Blair and Hewitt have pretended to promise – "a devolved NHS where 80 percent of the decisions are made locally". Working in the NHS is like pulling people out of a river without bothering to look at who's pushing them in. If Labour really wants patients to get involved in shaping services, it has to move the money upstream and stop the dysfunctional schism between top-down marketing and local decision making.

Junior Doctor Who

Most NHS resources now go on managing chronic illness, and many patients manage themselves perfectly well for all but three hours a year, when they're hanging round the surgery. Tapping into this expertise and getting patients to help other patients in their communities is the best hope of stopping the logjam downstream. The message is simple. Local partnerships between patients and NHS staff work, market reforms don't. But will Brown swallow it?

M.D.

SIGNAL FAILURES

FirstDroop

FIRSTGROUP's dismal showing in the latest formal rail passenger survey forced it to "apologise to our customers for failing to provide the level of satisfaction that they – and we – expect". Could this be the same FirstGroup whose chief executive had told investors just three weeks earlier: "Our UK rail division continues to go from strength to strength"?

Er, yes. But in modern Britain the two statements aren't incompatible. The "significant" decline in satisfaction found by the statutory rail watchdog at three of FirstGroup's four franchises – First Great Western (FGW), First Capital Connect (FCC) and First ScotRail – coincided with a 37 percent rise in UK rail profits for FirstGroup.

Fewer than one in three FCC passengers reckoned their rail ticket was good value for money – unsurprising after FCC used the excuse of overcrowding to ban discounted tickets on the Bedford line in the evening peak (*Eyes passim*). If WorstGroup were genuinely sorry for the dissatisfaction, it would rescind the ban and drop FGW fares to reflect its quality of service. But that won't happen. FirstGroup's priority is to improve not customer satisfaction but its UK rail profits – a meagre £109m in 2006-7.

FGW and FCC are two of the three most recent franchises awarded by a government which has taken unprecedented control of railways. (The third, South West Trains, started too recently for the early effects of the franchise – a whopping fare rise and downgraded trains on the Portsmouth line – to register in the survey.) But there was no apology from the government or rail supremo Mike Mitchell (who moved to the transport department from FirstGroup shortly before that department handed both of these big franchises to FirstGroup – see *Eye* 1150).

The contests and negotiations for each franchise cost millions of pounds to the government (ie taxpayers) and transport companies (funded by passengers and taxpayers). This is rail franchising after a decade of failures and refinement; yet the outcome for passengers is the kind of frustration which even had FGW passengers staging a fare rebellion.

But passengers aren't the point of rail franchising. In the media coverage of the passenger survey results the government wasn't required to defend its most recent franchise specifications; it happily left FirstGroup to apologise for "new" Labour's rail policy. That political armour plating is the only conceivable justification for a system that foists short-term franchises on an industry with long investment timescales, depends on armies of bureaucrats and other people who don't actually run trains, and permits one private firm to suck £109m profits out of the subsidised railway in just one year.

'Dr B Ching'

METRO HEADS

AN ANGUISHED letter reaches the *Eye* from within the management of Metronet, the firm that runs much of the Tube since Gordon Brown's public-private partnership took hold.

It complains that the new head of operational safety, former fleet manager Simon Peacock, has no specific safety qualification, while his boss, director of safety and assurance Ian Prosser, also has no formal safety qualification. The letter says a "macho bullying atmosphere" and "boys' club mentality at senior level" is not helping at a time when the firm faces pressure on costs.

A spokesman told the *Eye* that Metronet had reduced injuries at work by 70 percent, and that bullying was not tolerated. The director of safety for London Underground said safety had improved "significantly and continues to do so through a well-structured safety improvement programme".

But Metronet would not discuss the safety qualifications of its managers because it "will not comment on individuals". Which is odd, because when it appointed Rob Shipley, the previous head of operational safety, it was only too happy to do so. A press release then said Metronet would "deliver a 'DuPont' approach of a zero recordable injury rate" and to this end had recruited "ex-DuPont professional Rob Shipley". Other companies are also less tongue-tied: Martin Brown, chief safety adviser for Tubelines, worked for the Health and Safety Executive as a rail inspector for 20 years, a fact the company advertises in its literature.

EDUCASHUN NEWZ

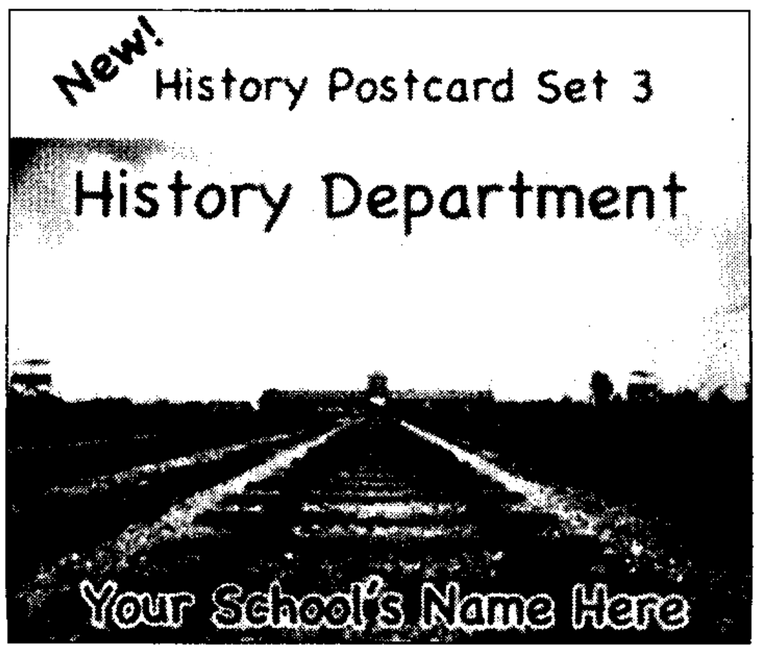
AT LAST the mystery over why planned compulsory computing tests for all 14 year olds were abandoned in January has been solved: the tests were utterly useless.

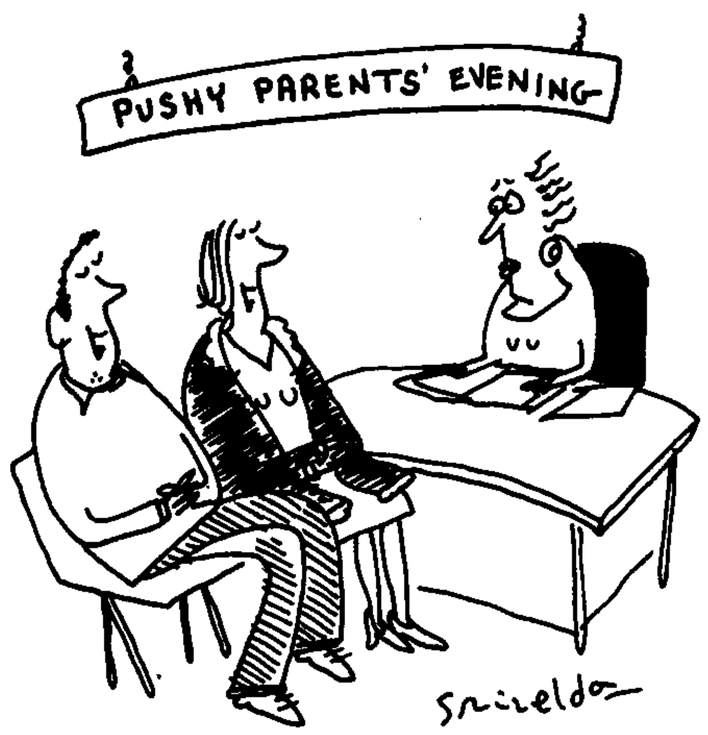
An evaluation report from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority shows why the Key Stage 3 ICT onscreen tests got the boot. Trialled in 1,750 secondary schools, more than half the children taking the pilot test got results markedly different from what their teachers predicted – a strong clue that it wasn't reliably measuring ability.

Teachers had opposed the introduction of yet another time-consuming compulsory test, but the report's warning that "less than optimal implementation would attract unfavourable public comment" was surely the final nail in the coffin.

EDUCATIONAL publisher School Stickers was quick to act on the suggestion in April's DfES guidelines on classroom discipline that schools should send postcards to pupils' parents praising their behaviour.

Curiously, very few schools have taken up their offer of this particular design:





"She's doing extremely well, thank you. She's a very bright girl... a genius, actually"

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

PORN AGAIN LIBERAL

SO. FAREWELL then Karl Lindon, sentenced to three years' jail last month after 2,500 indecent images of children were found on his computer. Kiddie porn wasn't Lindon's only interest, however: he had also carved a niche for himself within the Lib Dems in London, and Southwark in particular.

In 2005 and 2006 Lindon, 26, who lives in Camberwell, campaigned as a Lib Dem candidate on the area's Aylesbury and Walworth estates. Although replaced as a candidate in March this year when it became clear that he would be serving time at Her Majesty's pleasure, Lindon had until then led a charmed life among London's Lib Dem movers and shakers.

As well as campaigning across London as a Lib Dem spokesman on gay and lesbian issues, he was also a director of Beyond Ego Ltd, a company owned by Lib Dem activist Martin Hoscik that hosts websites including that of Bermondsey and North Southwark MP Simon Hughes.

City of Westminster magistrates ordered Lindon to pay £1,500 costs, issued a sexual offender prevention order and put him on the sex offenders' register for life.

Given that he admitted being a member of an online paedo-porn ring and to creating images of children being sexually abused, it is little wonder London Lib Dems are keen to draw a veil over how deeply he ingratiated himself with the party.

HICKS IN THE STICKS

HATS OFF to Torridge district council in Devon, where they have found the answer to the inconvenience of losing an election: simply ignore the result!

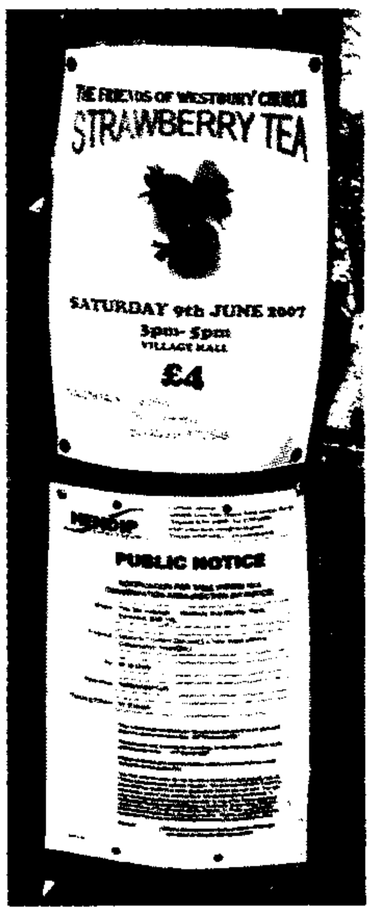
Independent council leader Pat Ferguson lost her seat at last month's elections, coming in seventh out of eight candidates in her ward. But in a secret deal agreed before the election, she carried on receiving her full leader's allowance after 3 May so she could act as a special "adviser" to the new leader, Tory James Morrish.

The deal to keep Ferguson on the payroll regardless of how she fared in the election was hatched behind closed doors by the three main political groupings (Tory, Lib Dems and Independents) in March and had the backing of council chief executive John van de Laarschot but was not disclosed to a council meeting 10 days before the election.

Ferguson, who never actually led her own Independent group, was allegedly kept on to help the new leader learn the ropes. The chief executive told the local paper this was "for the purpose of handing over details of the external bodies Mrs Ferguson sat on as a council representative". While she was passing on this intelligence she was to be paid the leader's allowance of £534 a month – a pittance compared to many other council leaders, but almost £200 more than members of Torridge council who had actually succeeded in being elected.

Alas, following uproar inside and outside the chamber, Mrs Ferguson will not, after all, be around to hold Cllr Morrish's hand.

PS: Alert readers may wonder how Ferguson came to lead the council when she wasn't even leader of her own Independent group. Easy: the real leader of the Independents, Bob Hicks, couldn't spare the time away from his business! Isn't democracy great?



●AH, JUNE – month of village fetes and flower shows. And also time for council jobsworths to spoil the fun. Organisers of a strawberry tea in aid of church funds in the village of Westbury-sub-Mendip, Somerset, received a letter from Mendip district council telling them they were not allowed to advertise it, in the traditional manner, by means of flyers attached to telegraph poles or phone boxes. "Charities and local community groups are permitted to advertise provided it is on private property with the owners [*sic*] consent and the poster/banner is no more than 0.6 sq. metres… Illegal signs [will be] removed by the council." As our picture shows, when it comes to publicising planning applications and other council business, Mendip council has no qualms about posting its own notices on the same pieces of "utility furniture".

STARTER FOR KEN

THE referral of London mayor Ken Livingstone's million-pound deal with the 72-year-old pisshead, sorry, distinguished transport commissioner Bob Kiley, to the Audit Commission is unlikely to have Ken quaking in his boots. The commission is headed by his old GLC chum and admirer Steve Bundred (*Eyes passim*).

While chief executive of Camden council in the 1990s, Bundred had to agree an £80,000 payout to his deputy, borough solicitor Amanda Kelly, who had accused him of bullying and sexual discrimination. In 1998 a European Commission report accused Camden council of illegally diverting cash to bail out a company run by one of its senior officers and his wife. Bundred was criticised for backing the grants at the same time that he was supposed to be serving as an impartial adviser to the Association of London Authorities. None of which was any hindrance to his appointment as chief executive of the Audit Commission in 2003.

Perhaps Ken should think about what Bundred said in a *Times* interview that year: "The notion that it [the public sector] would be better run by private sector managers, or in a private sector way, is completely to misunderstand the nature of local government." So how does he feel about a private sector manager being paid £3,500 a day to tell TfL how to run the Tube? Even after telling the *Evening Standard* in March: "If you ask me what I actually do to earn my consultancy, I'd have to tell you, in all honesty, not much."

TURNING OFF THE TRANNIES

OOPS! More embarrassment for Cambridge's painfully right-on council leader Ian Nimmo-Smith, who seized on accusations of "heterosexism" to oust troublesome former mayor John Hipkin from the Lib Dems after he suggested the city should build more family homes (*Eye* 1183).

Hipkin's remarks were made during a debate about a scheme favoured by Nimmo-Smith, under which developers Crest Nicholson aim to build 408 one and two-bedroom flats on contaminated land. However, there are further reasons to be wary of the scheme.

The housing association chosen by the council to manage it, Luminus, is headed by one Chan Abraham, a trustee and director of the Centre for Contemporary Ministry (CCM) and follower of "living prophet" Dr Clifford Hill.

CCM promulgates some curious ideas about sexual diversity in its cuddly-sounding newsletter, The Axe Is Ready. One recent contribution from Hill explained: "The whole of our heritage… is under a threefold attack from homosexuals, secular humanists and Islamists". Nothing for a PC council that last month appointed Britain's first transgender mayoress and mayoress to worry about there, then!

LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELDS

DURING a recent trip to Brazil, an interviewer commented to sports minister Richard Caborn: "I gather, Minister, that you are still shutting playing fields back in your country." *Ouch!*

Back in the UK, Caborn has been busy insisting in parliament that in the past few years there has been a "net gain" of 35 playing fields. But as he had just announced that 134 new playing fields had been created in that period, the maths clearly shows that 99 playing fields have, in fact, er, shut.

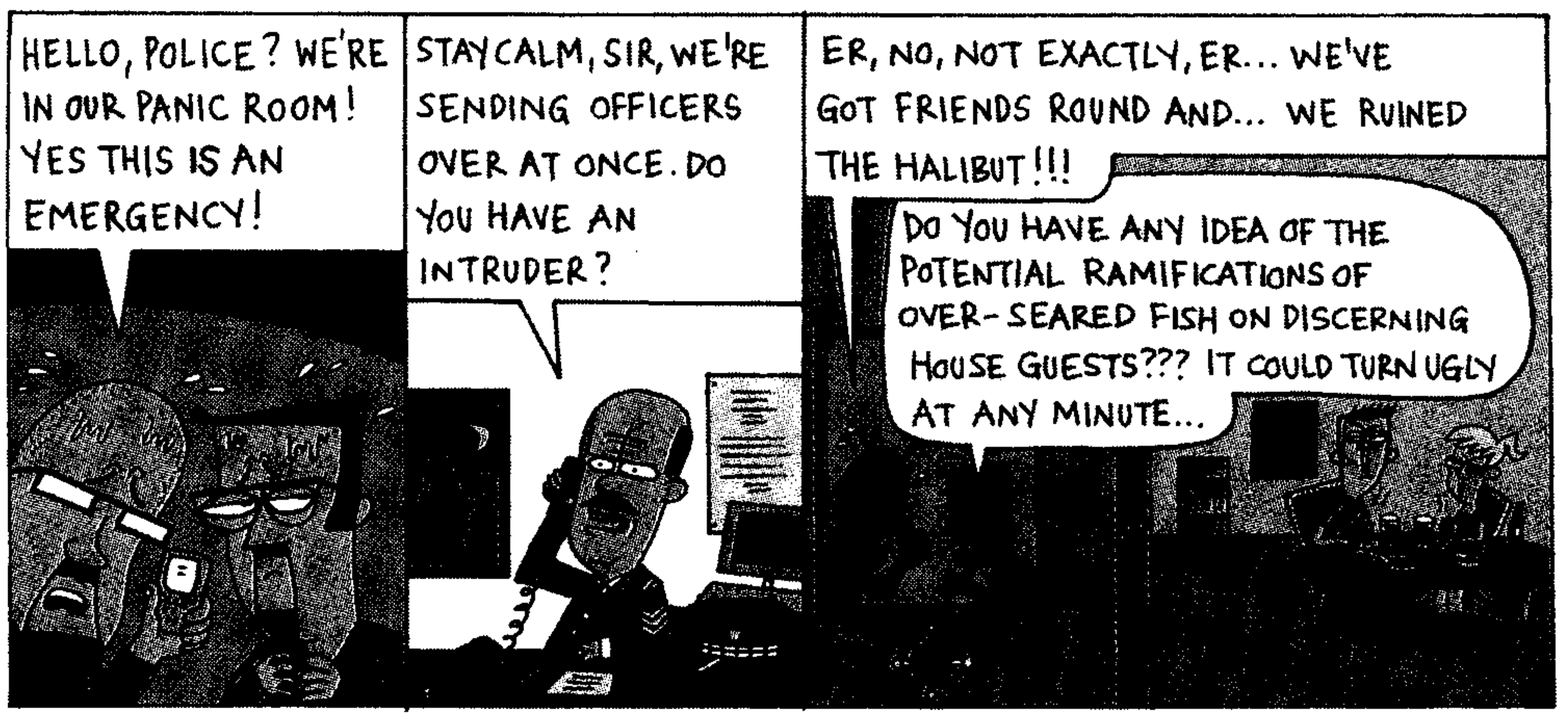
The sports minister was also singing the praises of new state-of-the-art floodlit artificial pitches being developed around the country. Unfortunately these pitches aren't always much in keeping the nation's youngsters fit, as they can't afford to use them. Swanky new Football Foundation-funded pitches at Paddington Recreation Ground are "consistently let out to high-paying sports clubs from outside the area," says local MP Karen Buck, leaving local youngsters – in a very deprived area – with nowhere to play.

DOCUMENTS released by Oxford city council last month under the Freedom of Information Act show that two playing fields in the city have been secretly considered for housing developments.

Planners had calculated that 118 homes could be built on Cowley Marsh playing fields and another 90 at Northway. The council said the list was for "long term planning" and didn't mean there was a presumption the sites *would* be built on… but it's now clear there's no presumption that they shouldn't be.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER


HELLO, POLICE? WE'RE IN OUR PANIC ROOM! YES THIS IS AN EMERGENCY!
STAY CALM, SIR, WE'RE SENDING OFFICERS OVER AT ONCE. DO YOU HAVE AN INTRUDER?
ER, NO, NOT EXACTLY, ER... WE'VE GOT FRIENDS ROUND AND... WE RUINED THE HALIBUT!!!
DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA OF THE POTENTIAL RAMIFICATIONS OF OVER-SEARED FISH ON DISCERNING HOUSE GUESTS??? IT COULD TURN UGLY AT ANY MINUTE...

NOOKS and CORNERS

MORE on superstar architect Richard Rogers, who this month was presented with the Pritzker Prize for his "significant contributions to humanity and the built environment".

Milord Rogers has certainly been banging on about the threat to humanity for long enough. Back in 1995 in a Reith lecture on the "sustainable city" he said: "Human life has always depended on the three variables of population, resources, and environment. But today, we're perhaps the first generation to face the simultaneous impact of expanding populations, depletion of resources, and erosion of the environment. All this is common knowledge, and yet, incredibly, industrial expansion carries on regardless."

Given such passion, villagers in Granada in southern Spain were surprised to learn that the Richard Rogers Partnership is associated architect for the proposed Coto de Macairena-Milenarium theme park which, they argue, is sustainable neither environmentally nor economically.

This "Parque Temático" will occupy 2.5m square metres of rural land between the villages of Dílar and Gójar, next to the Sierra National Park. It will consist of an "environmental thematic park" with "ecological lodgings", a golf course, hotels and 3,400 houses. This will – as the promoters themselves admit – increase the local population by 300 percent and water consumption by 800 percent, to say nothing of increased road traffic and more flights to Granada airport. All this at a time when there are 40,000 empty dwellings in Granada (and 3m in Spain altogether) and rainfall in the area is decreasing alarmingly.

The people of Dílar successfully resisted proposals for massive urban development above the village and along the river in 1990. But now they and others nearby are having to fight again. They point out that: "The villages on the plain of Granada have merged into an inhuman urban sprawl, often founded on speculation and criminal activity rather than actual need... Everyday, local newspapers report on the corruption between speculators, the construction industry and local politicians... To lose more of its natural resources in exchange for more bricks, cement and asphalt is not the type of progress that the area needs. The local population has never been properly consulted..."

One lot of architects has already pulled out of this very dubious project. Milord Rogers has not responded to letters sent to him about his role, so the local campaign group has started a world-wide petition on its web-site (http://milenarium.blogspot.com). Readers might like to sign it.

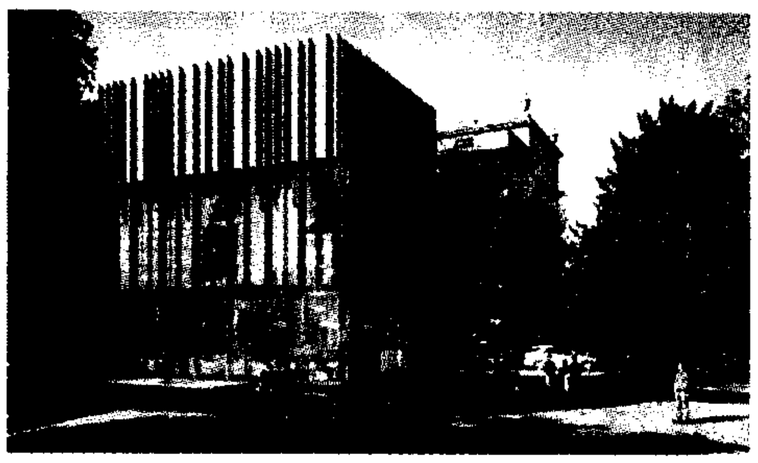
ANOTHER body behaving badly which ought to know better is (yet again) the University of Oxford.

The university has acquired the Radcliffe Infirmary site, recently vacated by the National Health Service, and commissioned the fashionable New York architect Rafael Viñoly to prepare a masterplan. This envisages twice as much space on the site than presently exists in the hospital buildings. This is to be achieved partly by going underground and partly by occupying areas so far left open.

This "major development" – which naturally is "crucial to the university's future" – proposes "to put some of the most beautiful buildings in Oxford into a new context". There are three listed buildings on the site: the mid-18th century original Infirmary building; James Wyatt's pioneering Greek Revival Observatory; and St Paul's Church in Walton Street by H.J. Underwood of 1834-35, described by Pevsner as "the finest Grecian church of Oxford".

St Paul's was made redundant in 1964 and derelict for some years until it was well and carefully restored in 1988 as a multi-purpose hall, called FREUD. Originally it was a free-standing building in the gardens of the Observatory; and when Lord Nuffield built a maternity hospital in those grounds, the new hospital buildings were set well back from the church, leaving space around it. This setting was considered important by Oxford city council when the church was converted. Yet, in the masterplan for the Radcliffe Infirmary site (about which the owners of the building were not consulted), it is proposed to build three-storey blocks close to it on either side, rising to parapet level and leaving "a relatively narrow footpath between". This, of course, will cut out most daylight from the windows.

The university's document states that the church's Ionic portico "was always intended to... be part of a tightly developed Walton Street frontage" and that "the Masterplan proposals will enhance the setting of St Paul's church". Yet no evidence for this mendacious assertion is offered. The University of Oxford's development proposals for the Infirmary site are therefore as intellectually dishonest as they are greedy.



MY PICTURE this week shows the proposed extension to the Holburne Museum in Sydney Gardens discussed in the last issue (1186), so readers can see whether the colour and treatment are suitable for Bath.

'Piloti'

I-SPY

London

Submitted by John Woolford.

£10 paid for similar submissions.

(SAE required for return of photographs)

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

AMID much champagne and some determined PR flannel, the Royal Opera House announced its entry into the world of corporate takeovers with the acquisition of Dutch DVD production and distribution company Opus Arte. The deal costs nearly £6m, plus some fancy banking footwork to deal with company loans of £2m.

Royal Opera chief executive Tony Hall, a former TV man, is pleased as punch to be steering the House into his old line of business. He declared it "a multiple win", a "substantial entry into the global market" and a "significant accelerator for our own big digital ambitions".

It's certainly a first. No other opera company in the world has dared do anything of the kind – still less an opera company with public funding. Every penny of that £6m (or £8m, depending how you look at it) comes from taxpayers, and it's being used to finance a commercial venture that some might consider inappropriate for a state opera house.

Now that it's in rough and tumble competition with EMI, Sony, Warner and the like, the Royal Opera will have to fight its corner in a volatile market where companies are more likely to lose money than make it. As an industry insider said privately last week: "What makes the Royal Opera House able to get away with this? Eight millions down now, and it will probably lose a couple of million each year."

It may be that the move brings Royal Opera productions to a wider public, or profits that can be ploughed back into productions. But you might remember that when the BBC started using taxpayers' money to fund "big digital ambitions" beyond its remit, it was quickly brought to task.

LUVVIES

"I had the pleasure of visiting the *Corrie* set while I was working on *Cold Blood* and I found it strangely moving. As soon as I walked into the Rovers, I just burst into tears."

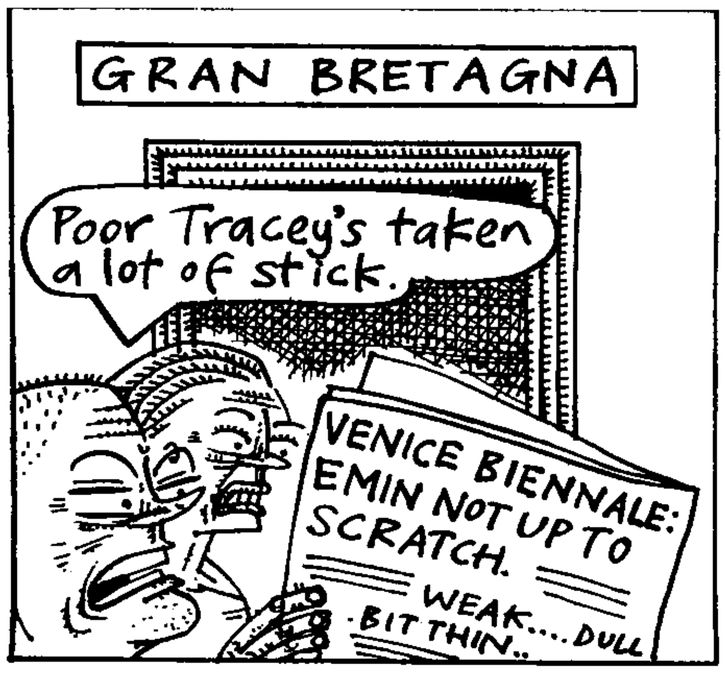
PAULINE QUIRKE
Radio Times

Submitted by Tim Hall.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH



MODESTY BLAZE

"I am a great thing for Britain, a great artist." – Tracey Emin, *Daily Telegraph*, 7 June.

Letters

Free the Lockerbie One

Sir,

It has been somewhat depressing over the last few days watching Westminster and the Scottish Executive's unseemly squabble over whether or nor the "Lockerbie bomber" has been included in a deal over Libyan prisoners.

As any open minded and fair person who has reviewed the evidence will tell you, Ali Mohmed al-Megrahi is totally innocent of the crimes for which he was convicted having been fitted up before a kangaroo court in the interest of political expediency.

Instead of emulating the excesses of a school debating society, Scottish Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill should seek to right this national disgrace by instructing the immediate release of Mr al-Megrahi who should also be handsomely compensated for his ordeal at the hands of Scottish "Justice" – what better way to spend a good chunk of the money which will undoubtedly be saved by cancelling the Edinburgh trams?

Sincerely,
JOHN EOIN DOUGLAS,

Via email.

Wisdom of Solomon?

Sir,

Charles Solomon (Eye 1185) wonders why you criticise flat-rate legal aid rates. The answer is surely that you are better informed than he appears to be, and that you are capable of distinguishing between legal fat-cats and rogues, whom you so often rightly castigate, and on the other hand those of us who labour at the coal face of Legal Services Commission "controlled work", delivering vital advice and assistance to vulnerable clients at rock bottom rates which have seen not so much as a cost of living increase since they were set, at non-too generous levels, in April 2001.

It is already difficult to pay salaries, rent and other overheads (none of which has stood still since 2001), and the situation is now further exacerbated by the introduction of a scheme which, far from fixing "reasonable fees" as Mr Solomon imagines, will perpetuate the same inflation-eroded fees for another four years and, even worse, will limit the number of hours per case to be paid for to such an extent that it will not be possible to give an adequate service without bankrupting ourselves, unless it is only those with the simplest of cases who are to be helped in future.

Solicitors and their staff stand to lose their livelihoods and their jobs, but the real victims will be the individuals who will no longer be able to enlist expert assistance in their legal battles, often against organs of the state at both national and local levels, on issues crucial to their lives.

These are the "poor people" on whose side Mr Solomon suggests you should be. In criticising the proposed fixed-fee scheme that is exactly where you are. Please keep up the good work.

VICKY GUEDALLA,

Deighton Guedalla, London EC1.

● See In The Back, page 29.

Metal fatigue

Sir,

The founding member of Black Sabbath as mentioned in Slicker's splendidly gruesome profile of Patrick Meehan was Tony Iommi (not Tommy).

I am ashamed of myself for knowing this.

MARTIN KENNEDY,

Via email.

False prophet

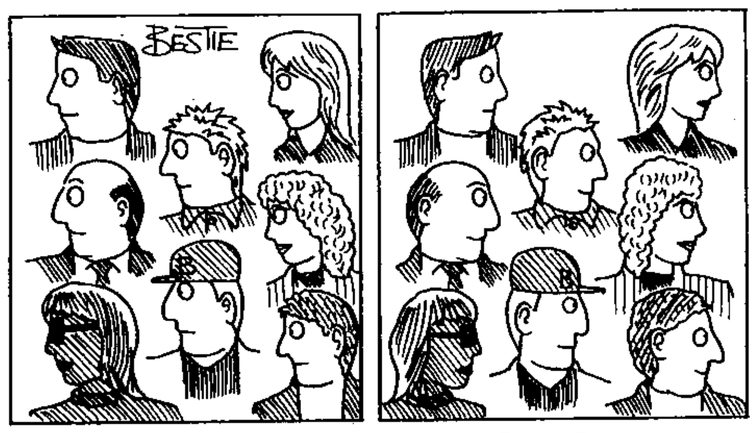
Sir,

I fear that the Reverend Blair may have misquoted the Good Book in his most recent newsletter (1186). While he wrote: "A prophet is not without honour except in his own land," I'm sure that he must have meant: "A profit is not without an honour in its own land."

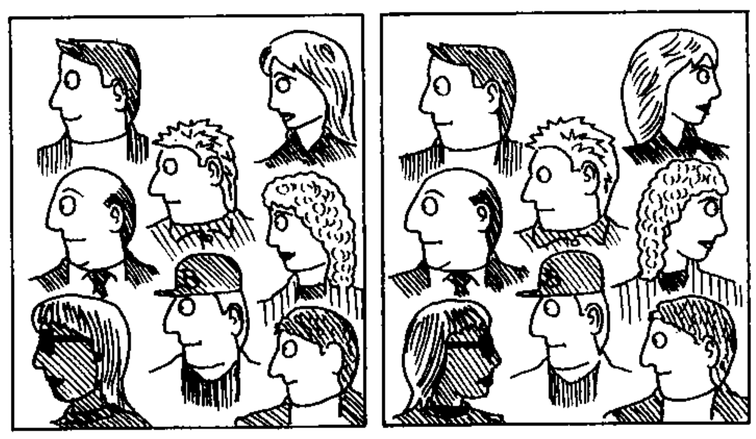
Perhaps Lord Levy, as the Reverend's envoy to the Middle East, where the Book was originally drawn up, would be able to clarify the intended wording.

Yours etc,
ED MITTING,

Via email.



TENNIS SPECTATORS



TENNIS SPECTATORS
WHEN SHARAPOVA IS PLAYING

Twin towns

Sir,

Re: Big Brother.

Sam and Amanda are not mouthy "Scouse" twins (TV Eye, 1186). They are, in fact, from Newcastle-under-Lyme.

Yours faithfully,
RICHARD BRIAND,

Leek, Staffordshire.

Plea for Mersey

Sir,

Piloti's continuing gripes about Liverpool's mismanagement of its architectural heritage (Eyes passim) is beginning to sound more than ungenerous. In the week that he was complaining about the Manchester Dock (Eye 1185) the city threw out plans to radically alter the grade 2 Wellington Rooms and completed the compulsory purchase of the grade 2* St Andrew's Church of Scotland in Rodney Street.*

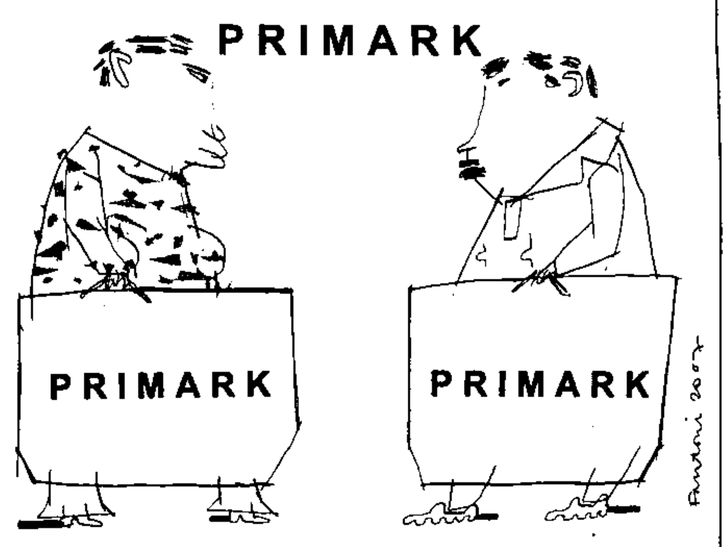
Now (Eye 1186) he takes the city to task for the demolition of a late Victorian commercial building which the City's conservation team thought not listable, though the real villains were the developers, Iliad, who have a history of hammer-wielding in advance of listing applications.

In that same week, English Heritage, responding in part to an approach by the city, listed the 1940s Lewis's Department Store, with its murals and sculptures by Jacob Epstein, as grade 2. Liverpool's architecture is cherished by popular local support and, it should be recognised, sustained by a level of political will not matched in the majority of local authorities.

Yours sincerely,
PHILIP MORGAN,

Audley, Stoke on Trent.

Scenes You Seldom See



"Tell you what... I'd be happy paying more for better quality"

Drink to that

Sir,

You mention a proposal to remove the "Needs Test" from planning considerations. It was this very same move in relation to pubs, as part of the Beer Orders of 1990, that caused the proliferation of large pubs in town centres. Over capacity led to huge discounting, which leads to increased consumption. Apparently, now there is a binge drinking problem in our city centres. I wonder why!

Regards,
BASIL STEVEN-FOUNTAIN,

The Hare and Hounds, West End, Surrey.

Whose values

Sir,

Yet another hilarious I-SPY column in 1186 ("TORIES' GRAMMER SCHOOL RETREAT")! However, your own organ also appears to have become rather slack ("... 'shocking secrets' of Big Brother housemates... One of them has a relative whose also not that famous", 1186, p22).

Now, it may well be that you've given an educationally challenged, long-term job seeker an opportunity to get some work experience. If so, that would be commendable; but surely at least one of you could have stayed behind that afternoon to supervise the poor fellow, instead of all of you skiving off down the boozer!

Yours faithfully,
IAN SMITH,

London N1.

Upper chamber music

Sir,

In Eye 1184, in your In The City column, you quite rightly lambast the poor House of Lords attendance record of Lord Browne. However, my girlfriend, who works in the mental health profession, has nothing but praise for the upper chamber in curbing the bills passed by the House of Commons that seem designed to satisfy scaremongering tabloid headline writers more than looking after the interests of, er, mental health patients and workers.

If the likes of Lord Browne, and all the slacking lords you have singled out recently, did bother to turn up for debates, perhaps the overwhelmingly sensible decisions reached by the healthily disinterested (albeit un-elected) lords would actually be jeopardised? So the lack of attendance by politically appointed lackeys could be viewed as a blessing...

Keep at them anyway!

DAVID SMITH,

Clapham, London.

Class war

Sir,

Your Dave Snooty cartoon (Eye 1185) is hopelessly wide of the mark. In the first place, Snooty is not "against grammar schools": he has no plans to end selection but is merely adopting the current policies of Blair, to whom he aspires to be the natural successor.

In the second place, it only takes a cursory glance at the social profile of our remaining grammar schools to realise that "oiks" are somewhat under-represented in these schools (by a factor of around seven) and are overwhelmingly more likely to attend Bash Street. The best way, therefore, for Snooty to restrict educational opportunity even more tightly to the upper and middle classes would be to build more grammar schools, as indeed his party would like him to do.

Private Eye has been my favourite publication for more than 40 years, not least for its serious journalism, but you have always been clueless about state education.

Yours in sorrow,
MICHAEL PYKE,
www.campaignforstateeducation.org.uk

Lookalike

Sewell

Shock jock

Sir,

After being sacked for calling black women basketball players "nappy-headed ho's", has US shock jock Don Imus found a new job as the Evening Standard's art critic, under the pseudonym of Brian Sewell?

I think we should be told.

Yours etc,
KEN WESTMORELAND,
Croydon.

Rich pickings

Sir,

Re: From Our Own Correspondent, 1186. Dan Ioan Popescu, Romania's former industry minister, may well admit to being worth €11m, but informed estimates put his wealth closer to, er, about €900m.

Some Romanians consider him (and not Ion Tiriac, Boris Becker's former manager) the richest man in the country.

Given that the High Court is only asking him to explain where €1.5m came from, don't expect more than a wishbone to drop out of his cupboard just yet.

Fond regards,
RENE LAVANCHY,
London W1.

Irish lament

Sir,

I have no opinion on Ms McAliskey's guilt or innocence (In the Back, 1186). I think it bizarre however that you should suggest that Germany, a country bound by the same human rights laws as ourselves, is not a suitable state to extradite terrorist suspects to due to deficiencies in its criminal code. Is this the best time for us to be tearing up extradition treaties with our neighbours?

The German legal system may indeed be the problem here in that it appears to grind on immune to political interference – somebody planted a bomb, we want to prosecute them. The German government has no vested interest in pursuing the matter. The CPS has tied itself in knots over the issue simply because it is not immune to political influences. It has allowed itself to become the back end of a pantomime cow in support of the "peace process". I am not complaining: peace is good.

You suggest that the timing of the arrest indicates conspiracy which would make this case unique in that all government conspiracies in this area to date appear to have been aimed at obtaining the release of Republican terrorists suspects. What is it about matters Irish that makes you rant so? Try some objectivity and reasoned debate, it's all the rage over here these days don't you know.

PETER FREEMAN,
Bangor, Co. Down.

Lashings of Broon sauce

Sir,

I was fair scunnered to hear that bogle Henderson claim the Broons only have two storylines. Every schoolboy knows that there is in fact a third. Pa Broon decides the family will take an ill-advised walk in the countryside where they invariably upset and anger the local farmers with their ignorance of rural ways and often end up with egg on their faces and a stern telling-off from the local magistrate.

They will usually set out on bicycles or some other form of green transport but will invariably be driven home in a coal truck, leaving big carbon footprints all over Glib, oops, I mean Glebe Street. Of course, it's just a cartoon and couldn't possibly happen in real life.

Hoots etc,
C. MCGUIRE,
Yorkhill.

Sir,

Michty me! Yon "Broon-ites" comic strip is the very dab. But whit's Paw Broon fae the original "Broons" daeing sittin' at a bar in the first strip (1185)? D.C. Thompson may have depicted smoking in many stories, but none was ever set in a place where alcohol was consumed. God forbid!

As for Fred Mathisen's (1186) commenting on "masel" being more correct than "mesel", two characters employ "mysel" in the "Oor Wullie" (the sister strip) of 6 March 1938, but then Dudley D. Watkins, the original illustrator, was English.

Yours aye,
ERIC BROWN OF THAT ILK,
Bromley, Kent.

Sir,

Whilst not wishing to be a Broon nose, I must congratulate you on your new comic strip. However, I have noticed, as have others, some inconsistencies and inaccuracies in auld man Broon's accent. I find it hard to believe that he would refer to himself as an "ole" man. That belongs to the Deep South – some mistake, shurely!

CHRISTINE MUNRO,
Via email.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"He hit that ball kind of running away from himself."
IAN WRIGHT, Talksport
(Julian Thake)

"My shoulder is not where I want it to be... but I've done a good job of monitoring it."
MARIA SHARAPOVA
(Andy Croxall)

"He [Crouch] has a very good record of scoring against opposition."
JONATHAN PIERCE, BBC1
(Glenda Petty)

"In the future, I plan on taking more of an active role in the decisions I make."
PARIS HILTON
(Jeff Idle)

"Hennessy has two difficult balls to deal with and he's dealt with them amicably."
KEVIN RATCLIFFE, BBC Wales Sport
(Andrew Drumm)

SOLUTIONS

"Teleperformance: creator of intelligent customer contact solutions" – *call centres*

"Ryder: delivering transportation and logistics solutions worldwide since 1933" – *truck rental*

"Greenblade: down-to-earth solutions" – *turf*

"Fotoview imaging solutions" – *photo developers*

"Resolve Business Solutions" – accountants

"Parkersell: providing cradle-to-rebirth lighting solutions for manufacturing, commercial, industrial, health, transport and retail sectors." – *lights*

All submitted by readers

Hirst for knowledge

Sir,

Don't want to show an outbreak of anoraksia, but if Damien Hirst was really inspired by "Inca skulls he saw while visiting Mexico" (1186), he may have revolutionised our knowledge of pre-Columbian America. The decorated skulls in Mexico are likely to be Mayan, the Incas did theirs in Peru, some distance away. Any more of this and I'll be reporting the Eye to "Dumb Britain".

CHARLIE POTTINS,
Via email.

Letter from **Shanghai**

from Our Own Correspondent

HOW reassuring to watch once again the leaders of the free world tie themselves in knots over how to help the unfortunate people of Africa. Today it is a pair of walking self-parodies, some chap called Bob who swears a lot and doesn't shave and another fellow with wrap around shades and even sharper tax advisers. A century and more ago it was the missionaries; but the message is the same: poverty and misrule in the Dark Continent is a scar on our collective conscience.

Here in China we look at things differently. A month before the G8 circus in Heiligendamm and its endless, empty pledges of aid for this or that, Shanghai played host to the African Development Bank and welcomed 3,000 officials, politicians and ministers from every country north and south of the Sahara.

There was barely an aid worker or photo-opportunity in sight. Our new friends from Africa went home with $20bn of deals from our Export bank; we managed to tie up a few more billion dollars' worth of oil and gas concessions in West Africa and some copper and cobalt in the Congo.

Even our President Hu Jintao is getting fond of Africa and, despite his "Howard Hughes" complex – the rash of allergies he suffers when he gets near dust or impure drinking water – he still visited Nigeria. Unlike your vicar, he didn't waste time in a self-perpetuating aid-dependent basket case like Sierra Leone.

Increasingly we are talking the same language as our African friends – literally. Thousands of Africans are taking up our offer of free Mandarin lessons. The demand is so high we're setting up Confucius Institutes in most African capitals to teach Mandarin and propagate the old philosopher's works – or at least those thoughts that don't contradict the precepts of "market-Leninism". Who said we Chinese can't do soft-power?

Last year Africa-China trade hit $50bn, up from $5bn just five years ago. It is set to double again to $100bn by 2009. When it comes to goods like cars, even Korea cannot touch us on price – still less rivals from Japan, Europe or the US. We build roads, railways and power plants for half the price you westerners ask. So it's not surprising our companies are winning more than half the public works contracts in Africa.

For us, business is business. While we were tying up deals in Shanghai, Europeans and Americans were tearing lumps out of each other over the unfortunate Mr Paul Wolfowitz and who should control the World Bank, the godfather of the aid and consultancy industry Africa props up. But as one African minister noted, does it really matter any more? Chinese finance for the continent is worth four times what's on offer from the World Bank. We have a trillion dollars to spend and there are only so many American private equity firms we can buy.

Western politicians, businessmen and non-governmental organisations say we fail to respect human rights in places like Sudan and Zimbabwe, or that we turn a blind eye to corruption. Well at least we're consistent: we don't respect human rights here either.

We also might point out that Rolls Royce, Weir Pumps and Siemens were counting their profits for years while Khartoum's mullahs were bombing and starving to death a couple of million of their own people. And in Zimbabwe, it's those British banks that keep Bob Mugabe in foreign credits and ammunition, not China's yuan. And corruption? We're novices compared to Halliburton and BAE Systems.

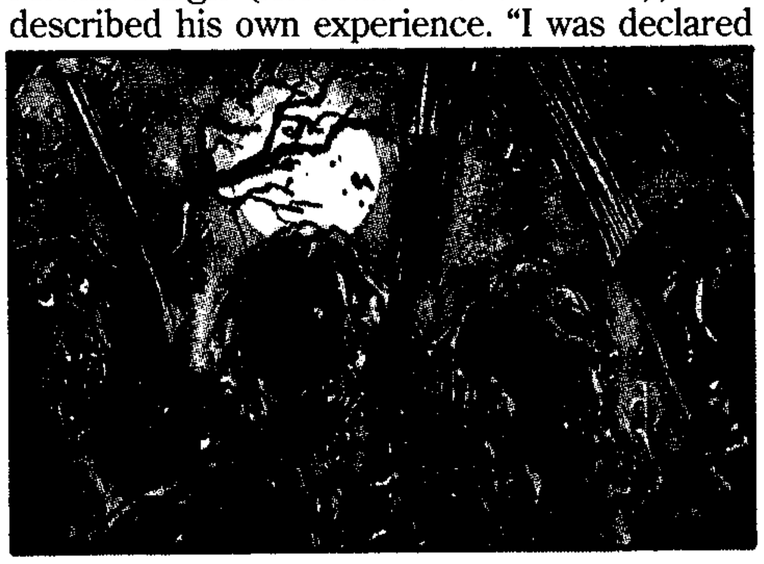
We do not claim to have the answers to Africa's problems. But your lectures and deep concern for the plight of the impoverished sound like cracked and unloved records. China is arriving and Africa seems to quite like it.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

O "We know that The Mritak Sangh party cannot win these elections," Lai Bihari told reporters in Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh, "but we are using them to highlight the problems of the living dead. There are thousands of people in this country who have had their lives and their legal rights taken away from them by unscrupulous relatives, usually in cahoots with corrupt government officials. I know, because it happened to me, and now I want to make other people aware of this scandal that has ruined so many lives."

Bihari, who is founder and president of The Mritak Sangh (Association of the Dead), then described his own experience. "I was declared



dead in 1976, thanks to an uncle who connived with officials to take over my property. My land was transferred to his ownership, and, because I was officially deceased, nobody would help me. I lodged complaints with the police, and kept telling the world that I was still alive, but it was only in 2004, after twenty-eight years of struggle, that I was finally declared alive by the government and had my property restored to me. The process takes so long that most 'Mritak' really do die before they can ever prove that they are still alive. And, because they're officially dead, they cannot even vote for a party that wants to change the law." *(Khaleej Times, 23/4/07. Spotter: Jamie Oliver)*

– O –

O *Products Manual. Water tank The Fittings – 307 folk art terms Water drainage valve.*

Adjustment And notice the thing carrying. Drain off water in the location and regulate completely tossed. Counterclockwise to is it drain off it water adjustment disk can increase the whole displacement, tossed clockwise rotation drain off water adjustment disk may reduce the whole displacement all all to rotate, see Fig 1.

A direction is regulated in the button: Can according to pursue direction rotate tossed, make half button, arrange button record with half button that water tank cover, arrange button corresponding direction unanimous all (Fig 3).

Trouble clearing.

Trouble symptom. Have not half drained off water.

Trouble reason. Journeys are not enough tossed that half a platoon presses the button. Half is it regulate tube with interfere by water tank, is it regulate the tube unable to is it blow to float to lead to the fact to drain off water.

Solution. Regulate half a row of buttons, make the journey tossed enough.

Trouble symptom. The water drainage valve leaks.

Trouble reason. The pottery drains off water the mounting hole of the valve cooperates with the surface to have crackle, full of funny bumps and holes etc.

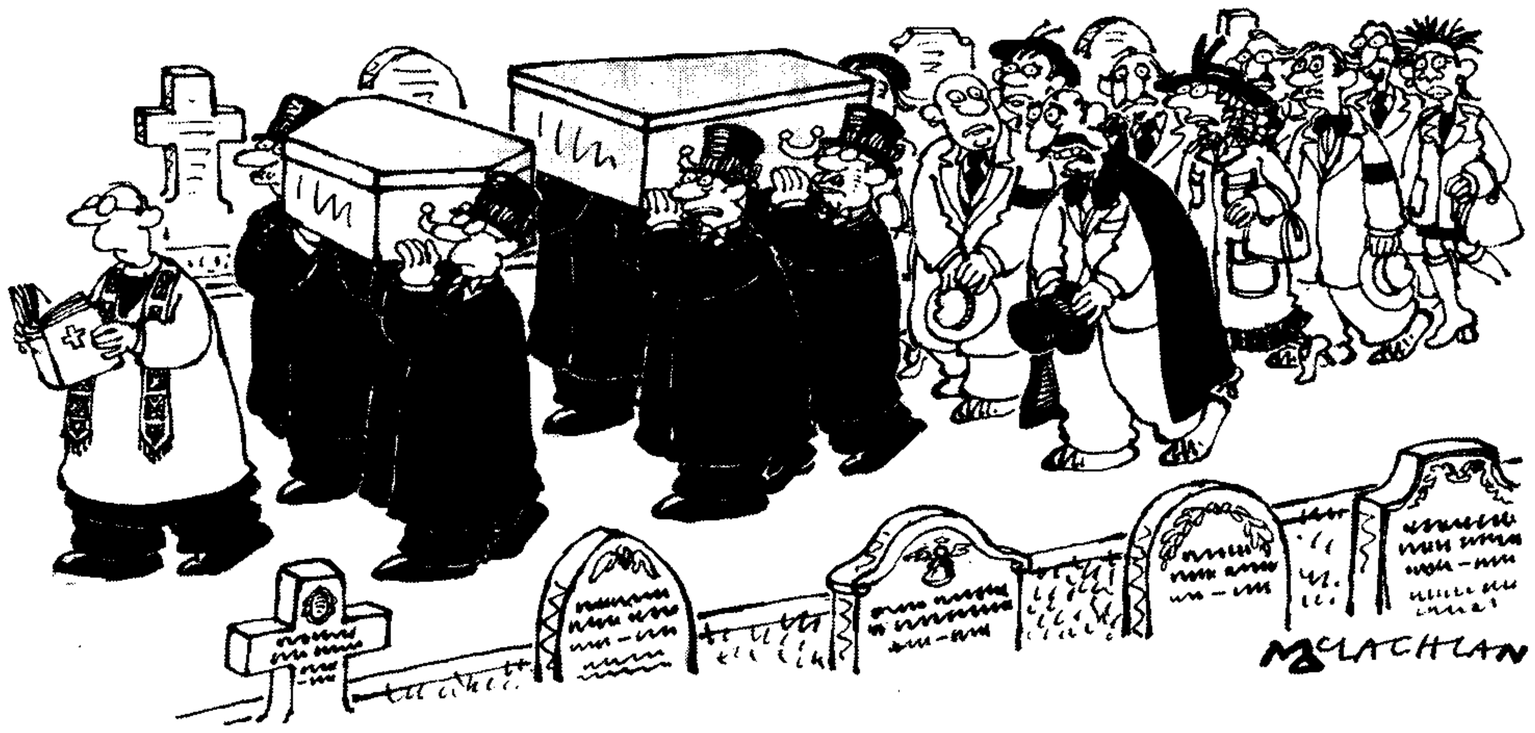
Solution. Should guarantee the ceramic hole cooperates with the surface to level, there can't be tossed crackle.

The limited responsibility of the products is assured. This product such as breaking down confirm belonging to the quality problem that processing and material reason cause through checking within warranty, our criminal company will change or maintain and deal with. (Instructions with Chinese-made water tank. Spotter: K. Davies)

– O –

O "It was a rape attempt gone seriously wrong," a spokesman for the Cambodian police force told reporters in Svay Rieng, "and Ta Sam was already dead by the time we arrived. It seems that he entered the family cowshed just after midnight, intent on having sex with a young heifer. Soon after, his grandson heard shouts and sounds of a scuffle coming from the shed, and rushed out to find his grandfather's naked body crushed beneath the frightened cow, which was lying on the floor. Injuries to Mr Sam's head and genital areas are consistent with him having been kicked by the animal.

"Further enquiries have established that 67-year-old Mr Sam had been divorced by his wife ten days earlier. This was his second divorce, and both wives had cited his insatiable sexual desire as the cause. His urges apparently overcame him in the middle of the night, with tragic consequences. We shall not be taking any action against the cow, as she appeared to have been acting in self-defence." *(Borneo Bulletin, 20/4/07. Spotter: Tom Bereznicki)*



"I still can't believe it happened – you couldn't wish for a more competent and beautiful magician's assistant"

LAST EVER!

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

THE END IS NOW!

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo! (And, as you know, this is, sadly, the very last time I shall be saying 'Hullo' to you all!),

It's quite a thought, isn't it? Quite a lot to get your head round!

But there it is! These things happen, don't they?

And life goes on! Doesn't it?

But surely, vicar, I hear you say, after all you've done for the parish in the past ten years, you can't just slip away quietly without leaving us with some really inspiring final message?

Something that we can all meditate on and treasure in our hearts in the bleak and thankless years that lie ahead!

So that's why I've been thinking very long and hard about what should be perhaps the most important sermon I have ever preached to you all.

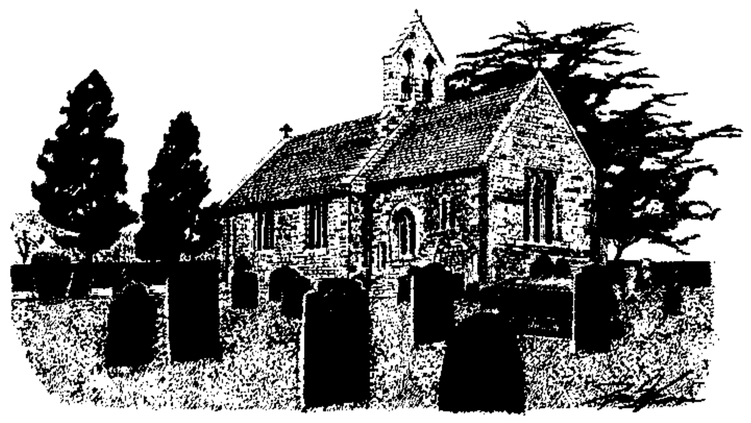
That is why I have chosen as my text those moving words from scripture, "I blame the media" *(Book of Excuses, 1.1)*.

Wonderful words, aren't they? And how true they are today, just as they have been over the ages for so many spiritual leaders before me.

Except that they are even truer today than ever before!

Because, hey, let's face it, it's almost impossible, the way things are today, for anyone to be a good vicar. Because whatever you do, however right you are, however much you devote your life to the parish 24/7, you can be sure that out there will be a horde of mean-minded, spiteful, nit-picking, self-appointed critics, scribbling away venomously in the local papers, or broadcasting their sneering, superior views on St Albion's FM, or interviewing each other on the "Good Morning St Albion's Community Television Project", peddling their daily diet of poison directed straight at me!

The Vicar found it hard to tear himself away from the parish he loved... as seen by local artist Mr de la Nougerede



Hey, don't get me wrong! I'm not whingeing! No one could be more in favour of a free press and everyone's right to speak their mind in any way they want!

But, frankly, wouldn't the world be a better place if they were all closed down?

Don't misunderstand me! I'm not calling for censorship. Just for what I call "Being Sensible-ship". And that naturally involves applying a certain amount of long-overdue control and regulation over what these people can write or say!

Because I've got a word for these people: 'feral'. I expect most of you know what a 'feral cat' sounds like at 3 o'clock in the morning, as it sits outside your window squalling and screeching at the top of its voice and terrifying all the old folk and toddlers for miles around!

And then this horribly mangy creature does its "business" right in the middle of your flower bed!

Uggh!

But that's what these feral so-called "journalists" are like, caterwauling away and ruining everyone's lives!

Hey, don't get the wrong end of the stick! I'm not suggesting for a moment that we should round up all the cats and put them in a sack and drown them in the St Albion's Reservoir (although, frankly, that's what they deserve!).

Let's just look at the facts, shall we? In case some of you might think that I'm going a bit OTT about this, let me just remind you of a few of the ways in which our local media have very much let us down in recent years:

1. Consistently failing to report the meetings of the PCC. These are very important occasions, even if I am too busy to attend them myself, owing to my many other commitments.

2. Confusing fact and opinion. I can't give you chapter and verse on this, but take my word for it, it's pretty disgraceful!

3. They seem to think that the only thing that matters is grabbing a headline or "making an impact", as they call it! What would people say if I went round doing the same thing, asking Mr Campbell to come up with some stunt that would get me publicity? It's too ridiculous even to think of! No one ever called Mr Campbell a "feral" cat, did they, or he would have replied with quite a few words beginning with the same letter!

4. If there is one local paper I hate more than any other, it is the St Albion's Independent and its editor Mr Kellner, which just goes on and on about my sermons on Iraq and my very special friendship with the Rev. Dubya of the Church of the Latter-Day Morons.

No one's interested in all that stuff any more! It's yesterday's news! It's over! We've drawn a line under it and moved on! I acted in good faith! Honestly! How many more times do I have to make this clear in order to persuade Mr Kellner and his feral newspaper to shut up?

I am not literally saying that the paper should be shut down. Just that the world would be a much pleasanter and happier place without it.

But, look, since this is my very last sermon to you all, I don't want to end on a downbeat, negative note!

All the same, I must repeat that my ten years in the vicarage, trying to serve you all to the very best of my ability, and to make the world a slightly better place (which I think, incidentally, I have done!), where was I... oh yes, my job would have been made a lot easier if only the media could have done their job properly and occasionally printed the facts, ie that I am the most successful vicar in the history of the parish, and that I have been right on every single issue in the past ten years!

But I don't want to end with recriminations. That is why this Sunday I would like to welcome all of you (except the journalists, obviously!) to our special Service of Thanksgiving for all I have done for the parish. And you'll be glad to know that I have somehow found time to compose a last chorus for us all to sing (to the tune of "Stand up, stand up for Jesus").

Thank God, thank God for Tony,
He will be sorely missed,
He was a first-rate vicar,
And not a journalist!

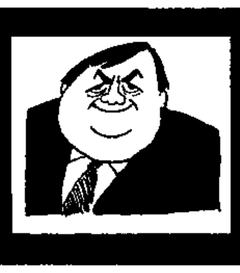
Good luck, good luck to Tony,
We'll soon be feeling down
When all we can look forward to
Is feral Gordon Brown!

Words and music T. Blair

No longer yours!

Tony

A Message From Mr Prescott



I may have been poorly, but not so poorly that I haven't noticed all the hoo-ha appertenancing to the emminent departure of Tony as the vicar, with scarcely any referendum being made whatsoever to the fact that I too am stepping down from my ten years in charge of the Working Men's Club. No surprise there, as I have been consistently underestamitified, having to play second fiddle to the vicar as he ponces around the world, shaking hands with the likes of Nelson Mandelason *and that little* Eyetie spiv with the banana on his head, who Pauline says looks like the greasy waiter in our local pizzeria (no offence, Silvio mate, but you're a daft booger and no mistake!).

The vicar gets all the plaudits while yours truly gets nowt, even though it is me behind the scenes who does all the hard work, such as knocking heads together when the vicar and the treasurer have another of their queenie fits. The smart-arses liked to call me "Two Jags", but they should really have called me "Two Jobs" – mine and the vicar's. Small wonder I got took poorly, what with having to work day and night without even the services of a diary secretary.

So that's me done. I tell you, I'm not sad to go. I shed no tears when I take down my cap from the hook in t'club and head off to one of my many homes in one of my many cars.

I don't know what the vicar's final message to you all is gong to be, but I can tell you that mine is "Get stoofed, the lot of you"!!

John

■ *At a special ceremony in the Tesco Car Park, Mr Prescott was presented by Mrs Blears, on behalf of the PCC, with a leaving present in the form of a traditional English croquet mallet.*

Parish Postbag

Dear New Vicar,

I am the former Churchwarden, as you may recall, and I just wanted to be the first to congratulate you on your new job.

You may have got the impression over the years that I was a friend of Tony's and didn't like you.

The truth is quite the opposite. Apart from anything else, I warned Tony time and again not to get involved with the Rev. Dubya. But he wouldn't listen... If only there had been a stronger-willed, wiser and more prudent vicar in charge, we would never have got into this mess. I wish you all the best.

Your old friend,

P. Mandelson,
Rue des Matelots, Bruxelles.

PS. Don't forget I am still operating as an all-purpose Mr Fixit under the business name "Handy Mandy – 24/7, no job too large" and I have a bulging address book of where everyone lives, which is, of course, at your disposal!

A Moving Farewell Tribute To The Vicar From The Rev. Dubya Of The Church of The Latter-Day Morons (left on the vicarage answering machine)

Yo, Blair! I don't know what time it is with you guys, but here it's... Jesus, someone's stolen my watch! Those pesky Albanians! I'm going to have to invade Albania-land to get my watch back. Will you be with me, Tiny, for one more great crusade against the evil watch thieves of Albinonia!! It's going to be just like the old days, Toby, me and you riding into town, Sheriff Dubya and Deputy Dawg, bringing freedom and democracy to the poor oppressed folks of Iran City! Yessir, saddle your horse! We're going to hang 'em high, whoever they are! We're heading out east... or is it west? I used to have a compass on that trusty watch of mine, but it got rustled by those Alquaedians under their evil leader Osama Bin Theredonethatgotthetshirt... hang on, hold it mister, guess what, I just found that goldarned watch! It's been on my wrist all the time! I'd been looking at the wrong arm! How's about that, Tommy? How dumb can old Dubya get? Guess we'll just have to invade Somewhere-else-ville!

Oh, by the way, Sister Condy tells me you're quitting. I got no time for quitters, boy! So maybe we'll be coming over to invade St Albionia!

Yessir, and Yes Surge too! Sister Condy tells me it's time to take my medic *(at this point the tape ran out)*

THE BROON-ITES
THE COMIC CRONIES LOVED BY THE NATION!
NAE SMOKING APART FROM GORDON YE SCUNNERS
GORDON! TERRIBLE NEWS THE NOO!
WHIT IS IT, WEE EDDIE McBALLS? FLOOD, FAMINE ...THE S.N.P?
SPORT SCOTTISH FRIED MARS BAR WOGGLING TEAM TROUNCED
JOCKSHIRE POST
WILD HAGGIS ESCAPES FROM GLASGAE ZOO
HENRY DAVIES
WORSE. IT SEZ THA' EVERYONE IN THE CABINET'S TAE GIVE EIGHTY POONDS FER TONY'S RETIREMENT PREZZIE!!!
EIGHTY POONDS???
EACH?
JINGS, CRIVVENS AND ASSORTED HOOTS!
HAVE THEY NAE HEARD O' PRUDENCE? WHAT HAPPENED TO FOBBIN' THE WEE SCUNNER OFF WITH A TATTY TIMEPIECE?
ACH! DINNA FASH YERSELS. AH'LL RAISE THE BAWBIES NAE BOTHER! AH'LL JUST ENGAGE WI' MA GREET BRITISH PUBLIC FER A WEE WHILE...
GORDON BROON IS IN TOON! MEET YOUR LEADER!
LATER, YE KEN...
THERE YE GO!
I KNEW ALL THAT PRACTICE TAKIN' TAXES OFF THE SCUNNERS WHEN THEY WEREN'T LOOKIN' WOULD COME IN HANDY ONE DAY!
EAT YER HEART OOT GEORGE BUSH!
HURRAHS AND HOOTS!

The Book of Ehud

Chapter 94: The Miracle in Gaza

1. And lo, it came to pass in the land that is called Gaza, that the Hamasites rose up against the Fatahites.
2. And the Hamasites cried out, "The Fatahites have failed to lead the sons of Palestine to their chosen land or rather the land chosen for them by the children of Israel.
3. "It is time for the Hamasites to sit in the thrones of power even as the Palestinianites have chosen (well, not all of them, obviously)."
4. And the Palestinianites took arms one against the other and the Hamasites smote the Fatahites.
5. And the Fatahites smote the Hamasites.
6. And there was much wailing and gnashing of teeth.
7. And the blood runneth like unto an river in the city that is called Gaza City.
8. And when Ehud, the leader of the Israelites, heard of this he rejoiceth.
9. For verily he could not believeth his luck. For he saith, "Verily it is like unto two scorpions in the sand who stingeth each other even unto death – instead of stinging the man with the big flip-flop who walketh on the beaches of Eilat.
10. "Even thus the Hamasites and Fatahites will smite one another an hundredfold and the burden of smiting will be lifted from the children of Israel."
11. And he gave thanks to God, saying, "Yea, it is a miracle. Your servant Ehud is thrice blessed".
12. But the Lord spake unto him, "Counteth not thy chickens, matey, before they are hatched. For this one will endeth badly. Marketh my words".

To be continued...

Those Birthday Honours Knights In Full

❶ **Sir Smoked Salman** (services to the Book Burning Industry)

❷ **Sir Beefy "Reefy" Botham** (services to the British Meat Marketing Board)

❸ **Sir Wallace and Sir Gromit** (services to the British Cheese Industry)

❹ **Sir Ernst Blofeld (ex-Head of Spectre)** (services to Worldwide Espionage)

❺ **Dame Dame Edna** (services to the Transgender and Transexual Community)

❻ **Queen David Starkravinglooney** (services to History and Rudeness)

❼ **Not Sir David Beckham** (services to Rebecca Loos)

DAILY EXPRESS

Barrymore latest:

DID DUKE OF EDINBURGH KILL MAN IN POOL?

By Express Reporters Mohamed Fayed

STARTLING new evidence has come to light proving that the Duke of Edinburgh was personally involved in the murder of the man found dead in a swimming pool in Paris. Secret tapes of the popular entertainer Michael Barrymore personally name the Duke as the mastermind who drove a white Fiat Uno into Barrymore's swimming pool.

The allegations are being taken seriously by the police who have assigned a special unit, the Fuggin' Squad, to reopen the case which *(cont. p. 94)*

On other pages ● **Tina Brown:** *The Michael Barrymore I Knew.* Exclusive serialisation of the New York author's next sensational book.

GLENDA SLAGG

■ HATS OFF to Tina Brown!!?! Bubbly bosomy Tina's in town!?! Yes, the Glamorous Gal from the Big Apple is here to promote her sensational page-turner on Princess Di! OK, there are 878 Diana books already which all tell you the same thing!?! Who cares!?! Tina's is the only one that's having a big VIP celebrity party this week!?! See ya there Mister!?! And put the champagne on ice!!?!

■ TINA BROWN – aren'tchasick-ofher?!?? Blimey!? We thought we'd seen the last of this graspin' go-getter when she crossed the pond with her clapped-out hubby – no offence Sir Harold!?! But, Gawd 'elp us, here she is again a-huffin' and a-puffin' her two-bit tome on the People's Princess!?! Yawn! Yawn! We've read it all before, love, and it wasn't interesting then!?! Take Auntie Glenda's advice, Tina – scarper back to the Big Apple and leave us to drink your champagne in peace!?! Get lost and we'll carry on a-slurpin' and a-burpin' at your expense!?!!

■ THREE CHEERS for the Wags!?! That's 'Wives And Galfriends' to you, Mister!?! Yes, they've all finally tied the knot – so now it's Mr and Mrs Stevie G, Mr and Mrs Terry J, Mr and Mrs One-Of-The-Neville Brothers, and Mr and Mrs The Other Footballer Whose Name We Can't Remember!?! All together now – "Here comes Wayne Rooney in a helicopter!"!?!

■ WAGS!??! SLAGS, I call them!?! That's 'Stupid Lazy and Grasping Slappers' – Geddit?!? No wonder we lost the World Cup when all their hubbies-to-be could think about was how they were going to foot the bill for the million-pound-a-minute receptions!?!! And to cap it all poor Wayne Rooney, the spud-faced nipper, had to fly round the country in a helicopter just to congratulate the blushing brides!?! All together now – "Here Comes The Bill!" Blimey!?!

■ *HERE HE IS – Glenda's Midsummer Man of the Month!*

● **Sir Stephen Richards.** He's the Flashing Judge – or rather he isn't?!?? Pity – I wouldn't mind His Ludship giving *me* a quick peek at his privates on the 8.17 to Waterloo!?!! All rise, Your Honour!?! Geddit!?!!

Byeeeee!!!

The Daily Telegraph
Friday, June 22, 2007

GCSE Joy Sweeps Nation

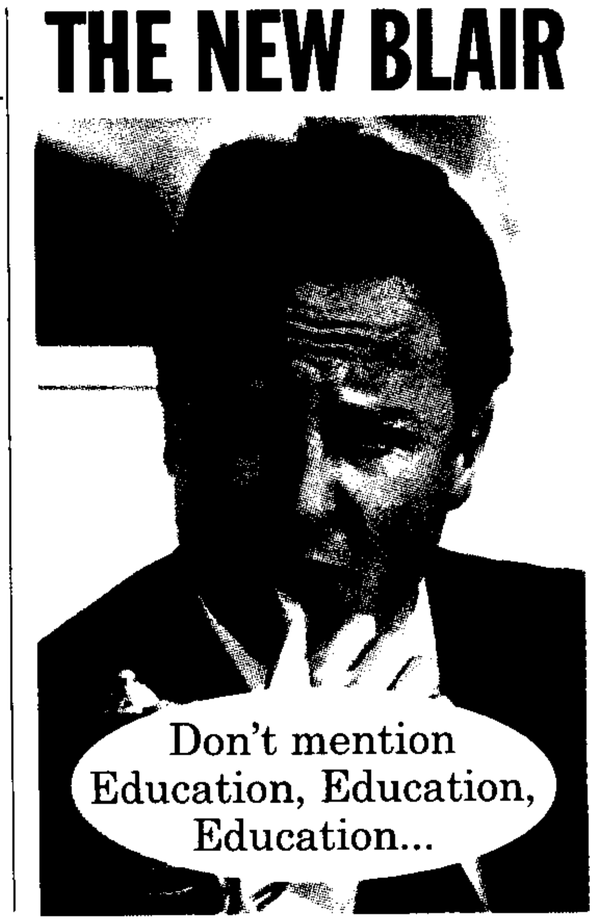
by Our Education Staff
Phil Homework-Folder

THERE were scenes of jubilation at schools across the nation as delighted parents received the result they were hoping for – that GCSE coursework is to be scrapped.

"I'm thrilled," said one teenager's dad. "It's just what I was hoping for," said another youngster's mother. "Now I don't have to write any more essays or do any more projects ever again!"

But there was dismay among traditionalists about the effect this would have on standards. Said a 16-year-old expert, "This is bound to lead to a decline in the quality of my leisure time. How on earth am I supposed to watch television if my parents are not going to *(cont. p. 94)*

"Welcome back"



THE TIMES
Friday March 20 2028

25th Anniversary of War Commemorated

by Our Defence Staff **Stanley Port and Georgia South**

Yes, it was 25 years ago today that our boys went into Iraq to liberate Baghdad after it wasn't invaded. And yet nearly a quarter of a century later we are still there. Who would have thought it?

The occasion was marked by no celebrations, no services and the traditional protest march past, demanding "Troops Out Now".

Don't Rejoice!

It seems like only yesterday that there was fierce fighting on the other side of the world and heavy casualties for the stretched British Armed

Forces – that's because it was only yesterday.

DAVE SPART (Co-Chair of the Troops Out of Iran and Free The Guacamole Bay Three Now campaign) writes on the 150th anniversary of the birth of Sir Edward Elgar.

It is totally sickening the way the media, ie the capitalist press and the state-run puppet regime at the BBC, have shamelessly promulgated non-stop tributes to the arch-reactionary Edward Elgar, the imperialist lackey who composed such notorious jingoistic tunes as the *Land of Pomp and Circumstance* and other Fascist marching songs that whipped up the hysteria that directly resulted in the First World War and the deaths of millions of innocent Germans at the hands of the hated British-American Coalition forces who had invaded Europe on the totally spurious pretext that the Kaiser Wilhelm had weapons of mass destruction, ie poison gas, when all along the ulterior motive was to get their greedy hands on German oil, er, a conspiracy to which Elgar gave his 100 percent support by writing his cello concerto.

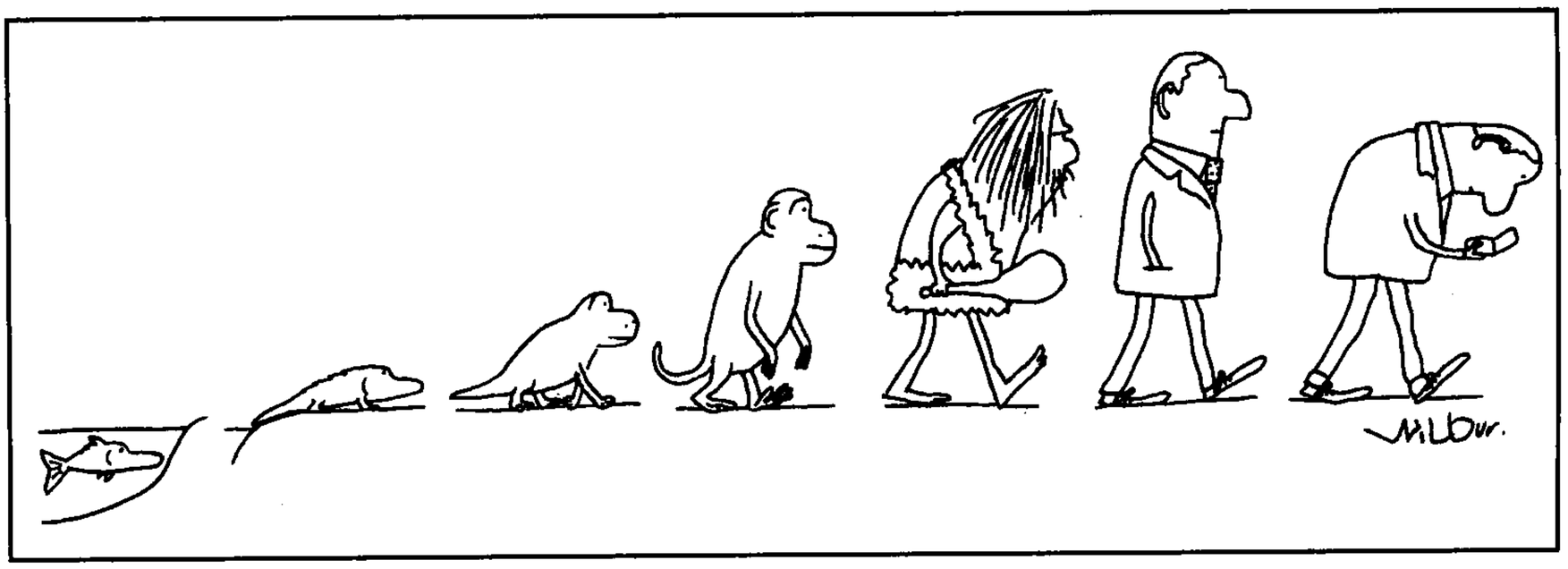
● *Do you agree with Dave Spart that Elgar should be tried as a war criminal, along with Milosevic, Rumsfeld and Blair? Or would you prefer to listen to Sir Arnold Bax's tone-poem* Tintagel*? We don't care, but the editor's desperate to fill the paper, so please write something, even if it's only what you had for breakfast, at www.morerubbishnow.allpapers.co.uk*

MODERN NURSERY RHYMES

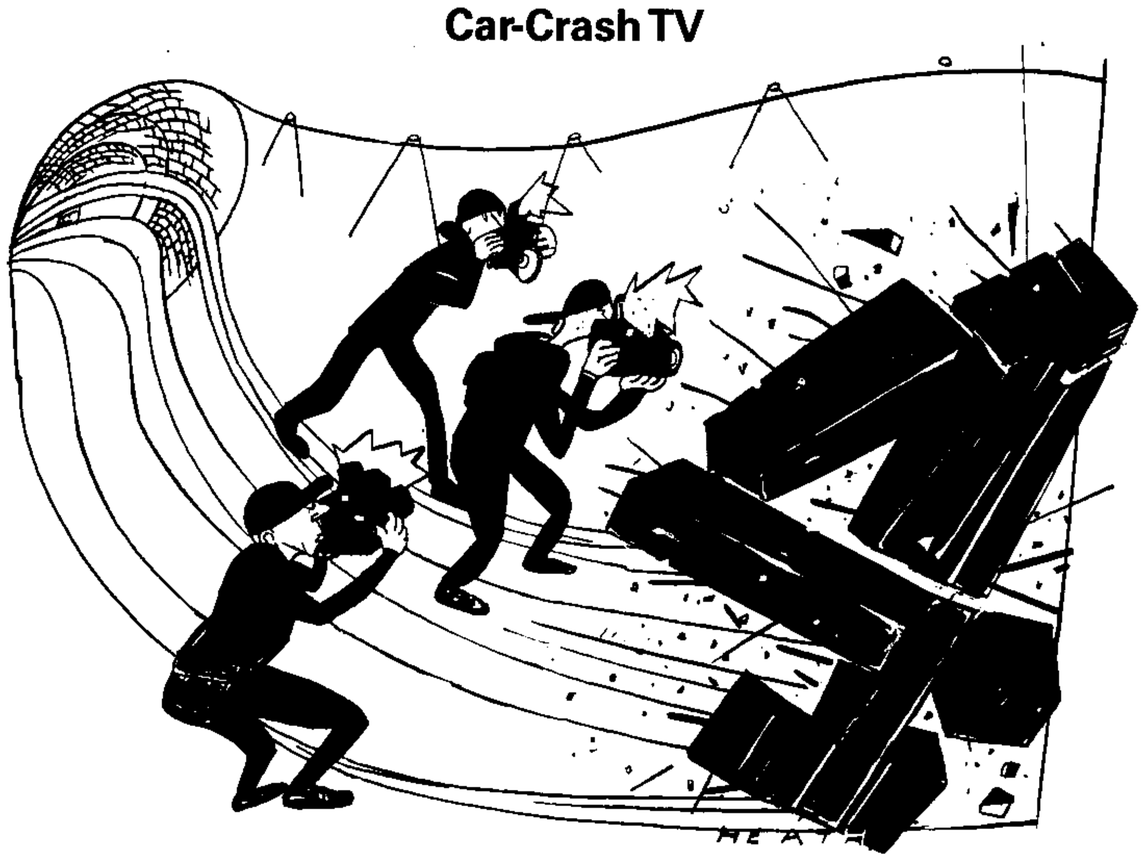
The grand old Duke of York
He wrote ten thousand words.
He sent them off to the *Daily Telegraph*
But they only printed 500 of them
Because they were rather dull.

● Do you haver a favourite nursery rhyme? Or do you think they are just for kids? Or maybe you don't care either way? Post your views on the messageboard at www.desperate-rubbish.telegraph.co.uk and make 'Nursery Rhymes' today's 'Hot Topic', toppling 'Your Stairlift' from the Number One slot (so far 3 hits!)

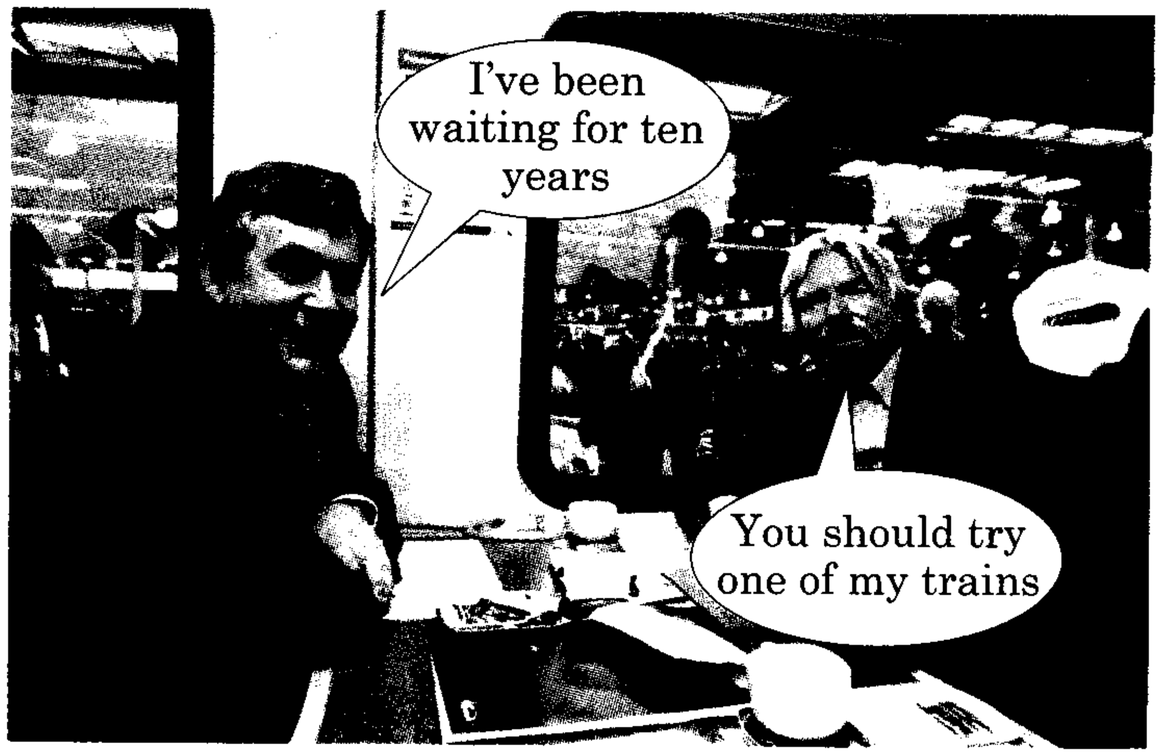
TNT magazine



Car-Crash TV



IT'S THE GORDON EXPRESS!



HOW TO QUIT

KICKING THE NOXIOUS WEED

An Eye guide to coping with the July deadline

From the beginning of next month people across the country will be faced with the prospect of giving up Tony Blair. Millions are addicted to him, even though they know he is anti-social and damaging to their health. Many will suffer withdrawal symptoms as they try and quit Blair and some will even experience a craving to take him up again as they experience 'Cold Gordon'. To help them to get over this dependency the Eye offers a 5-step guide to quitting the filthy habit for good.

1. PATCHES Stick them over your eyes so you can't see the newspapers.

2. GUM Chew it then insert it in your ears so you can't hear the radio or TV.

3. SUBSTITUTE Try a Blair substitute like David Cameron. It's mild, not unpleasant and you're unlikely to get hooked.

4. HYPNOSIS Go into a deep sleep whenever Gordon Brown makes a speech.

5. TAKE UP SMOKING It'll take your mind off the fact that Tony's gone and left Gordon to clear up the mess.

POETRY CORNER

Lines On The Award Of The MBE To Former *Dad's Army* Star Bill Pertwee

So. Congratulations
Bill Pertwee.

You played
The Air Raid
Warden
In *Dad's*
Army.

"Put that
Light out!"

That was
Your catchphrase.

But yours
Remains
Brighter
Than ever.

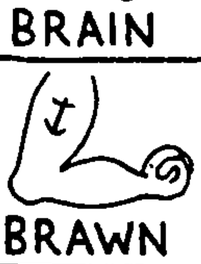
E.J. 'Stupid Boy' Thribb (17½)

WORD LADDER PUZZLE

BLAIR

BLAIN* (*A sore.)

BRAIN



BRAWN

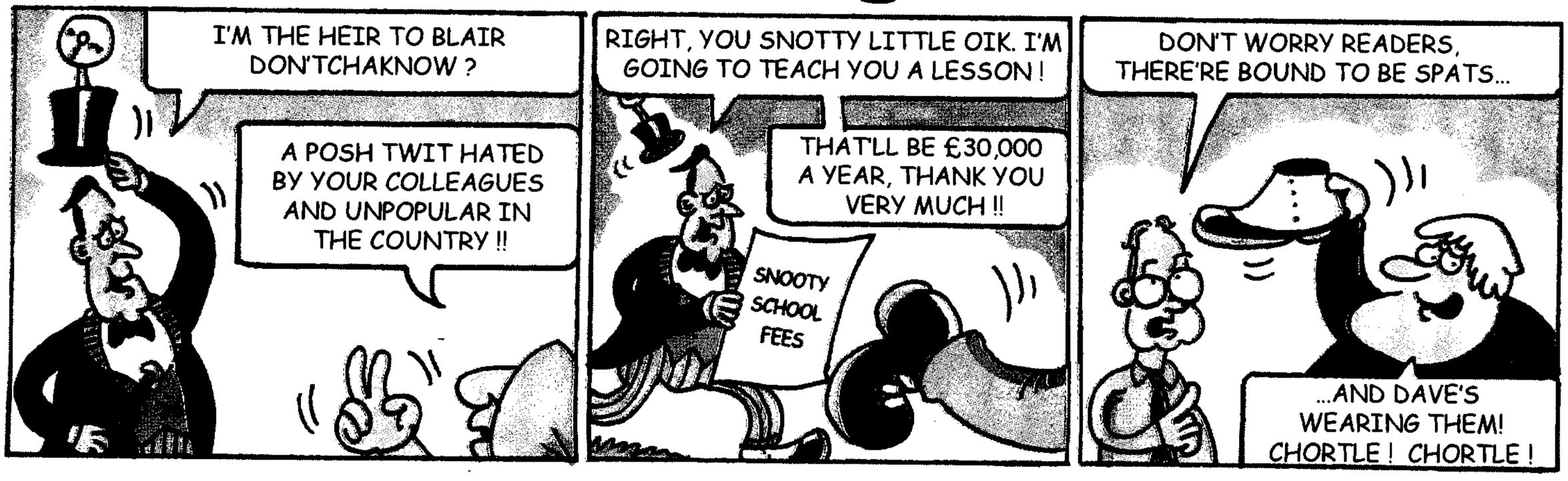
BROWN

CROWN

apparently

BY • MIKE BARFIELD

Dave Snooty AND HIS PALS


I'M THE HEIR TO BLAIR DON'TCHAKNOW ?
A POSH TWIT HATED BY YOUR COLLEAGUES AND UNPOPULAR IN THE COUNTRY !!
RIGHT, YOU SNOTTY LITTLE OIK. I'M GOING TO TEACH YOU A LESSON !
THAT'LL BE £30,000 A YEAR, THANK YOU VERY MUCH !!
SNOOTY SCHOOL FEES
DON'T WORRY READERS, THERE'RE BOUND TO BE SPATS...
...AND DAVE'S WEARING THEM! CHORTLE ! CHORTLE !

Let's Parlez Franglais!

Lesson 94 Dans le European Summit

Monsieur Sarkozy *(pour c'est lui)*: Bonjour Tony. Ici un treaty trés important that Herr Merkel a composé

Monsieur Blair: Qu'est-ce que c'est dans le treaty!

Madame Merkel: Ne worry pas! Ce n'est pas dodgy comme certain dossiers je could mention!

Blair: Mais it's not a constitution j'espere.

Sarkozy: Ooh la la. Non!

Merkel: Constitution? Quelle Horreure!?

Sarkozy: Ok. Juste un bit – mais considerez this a moment!

Blair: Que?

Sarkozy: If cette dossier non-dodgy *were* un constitution...

Merkel: Which it is *nein*..

Sarkozy: Toute la Power would go to le nouveau President – le grand fromage, le banana en haut...

Merkel: Le Führer...

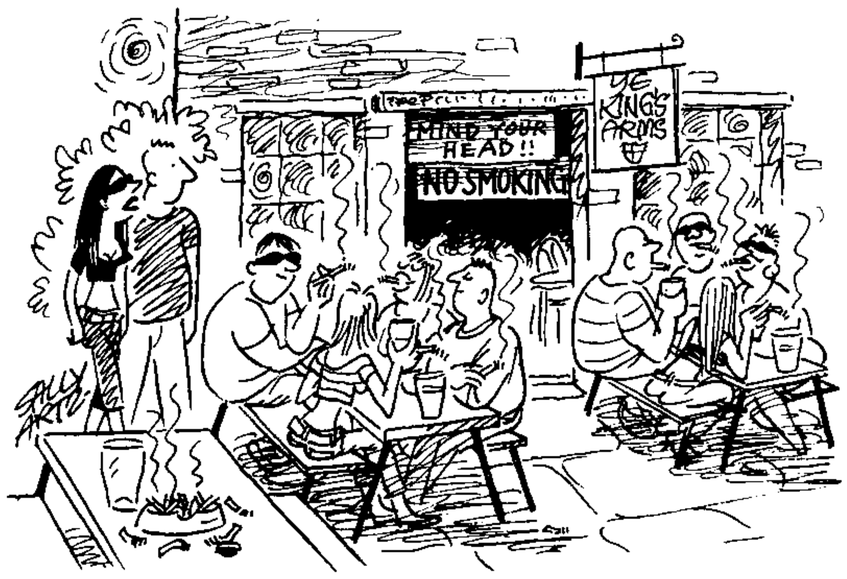
Blair: Et qui sera le nouveau President!

Sarkozy: Vous mon ami!!!!! Vous ètes le first choice!

Blair: Donnez moi la plume! Ou do I sign?!!

NEXT WEEK: Le pauvre Gordon realises que Tony est his new boss!?

© Kilometres Kington



"Let's go inside – I can't stand the smoky atmosphere"

BUSH RECEIVES HEROES WELCOME IN ALBANIA

theguardian

Mr Blair and The Media

The Prime Minister's valedictory blast at the shortcomings of the British media contained much that is worth saying and much that is worth reflecting on... many good points... media not sacrosanct... put its house in order... terrific attack on the Independent... ha, ha, ha... can't last for much longer... Blair good man.

©A. Rubbisher. *The Grauniad*

● Would you like to download a podcast of Alan Rubbisher playing the piano and singing this Guardian Lieder?

● Or would you like a free facsimile cover of how the Guardian reported one of the great moments in the 20th century – the changeover from the old Guardian broad sheet to the exciting new-look Guardian format that we know today.

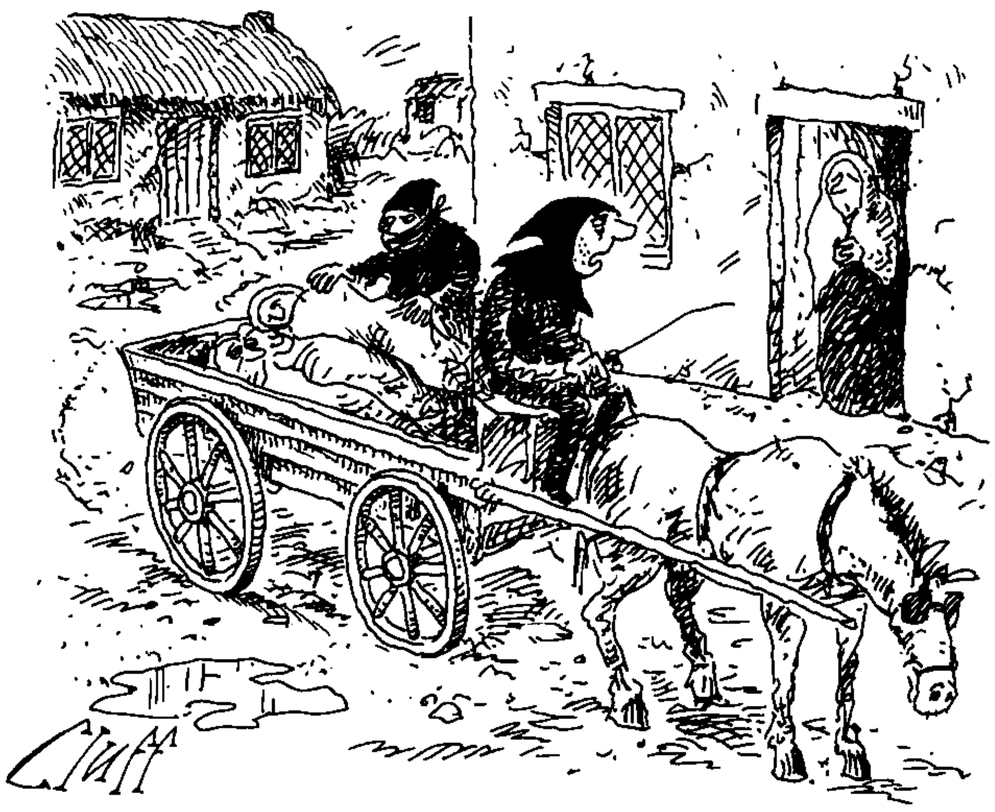
22.11.1963 *The* **Grauniad**

Ich bin ein Berliner!

President John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the 35th President of the United States, was shot during a motorcade drive through downtown Dallas this afternoon. He died in the emergency room of the Parkland Memorial Hospital 32 minutes after the attack. He was 46 years old. He is the third President to be assassinated in office since Abraham Lincoln and the first since President McKinley in 1901.

In the late afternoon the Dallas police took into custody a former Marine, one Lee H Oswald, aged 24, who is alleged to have shot a policeman

"You can only bring out your dead every two weeks now"



Advertisement

New From

BLAIRFIX

The British Aerospace Model Tornado Jet Fighter

CONTAINING over 1 billion separate pounds *(Surely 'parts'? Ed.)*, this Blairfix kit provides hours of fun as you assemble the replica bribe *(Surely 'aircraft'? Ed.)* and pretend that you are Prince Bandar of Saudi Arabia!

BLAIRFIX

WARNING: Aircraft not included

PRICE: £40bn to the taxpayer

'WOOLMER NOT ALIVE'

Jamaican Police New Claim

by Our Man In The West Indies **Trevor Barbados**

IN THE latest sensational twist to the mystery surrounding the death of the Pakistani cricket coach Bob Woolmer, the head of the Jamaican police investigation Inspector 'Knacker of the Yardie' Knacker yesterday held a press conference to announce that his enquiries were now concluded.

"I know I said in earlier reports that Mr Woolmer had been strangled by the entire Pakistani team, poisoned by 'match fixers' from the sub-continent, eaten by Dr No-style crocodiles, or was possibly alive and well and living happily with Shergar and the late Lord Lucan somewhere in Mozambique" said the Inspector.

"I now realise that he died of natural causes, that there were no suspicious circumstances surrounding his death and that you may find it difficult to take anything I say seriously *(cont. p 94)*

● Do you have a theory about the fate of Bob Woolmer? Do you have no qualifications to talk about this at all? Then we'd like to hear from you, and your views will be given equal prominence with those of Simon Heffer on our new Read-It-On-The-Blog page at www. desperateforrubbish.telegraph.co.uk

"Oh... it turns out Professor Plum died of a heart attack"

My Favourite Spoon
Beginners
Saturday 18 & Sunday 19 August
Cost: £78. No concessions

Victoria & Albert Museum course

Signs of ignorance
Many drivers could do with a crash course in road signs, according to a new survey.

Daily Telegraph

A Taxi Driver writes

Every week a well-known taxi driver writes on an issue of topical importance. This week **Jimmy 'Doc' Reid**, Glasgow Cab No. 666, on the problem of reoffending paedophiles.

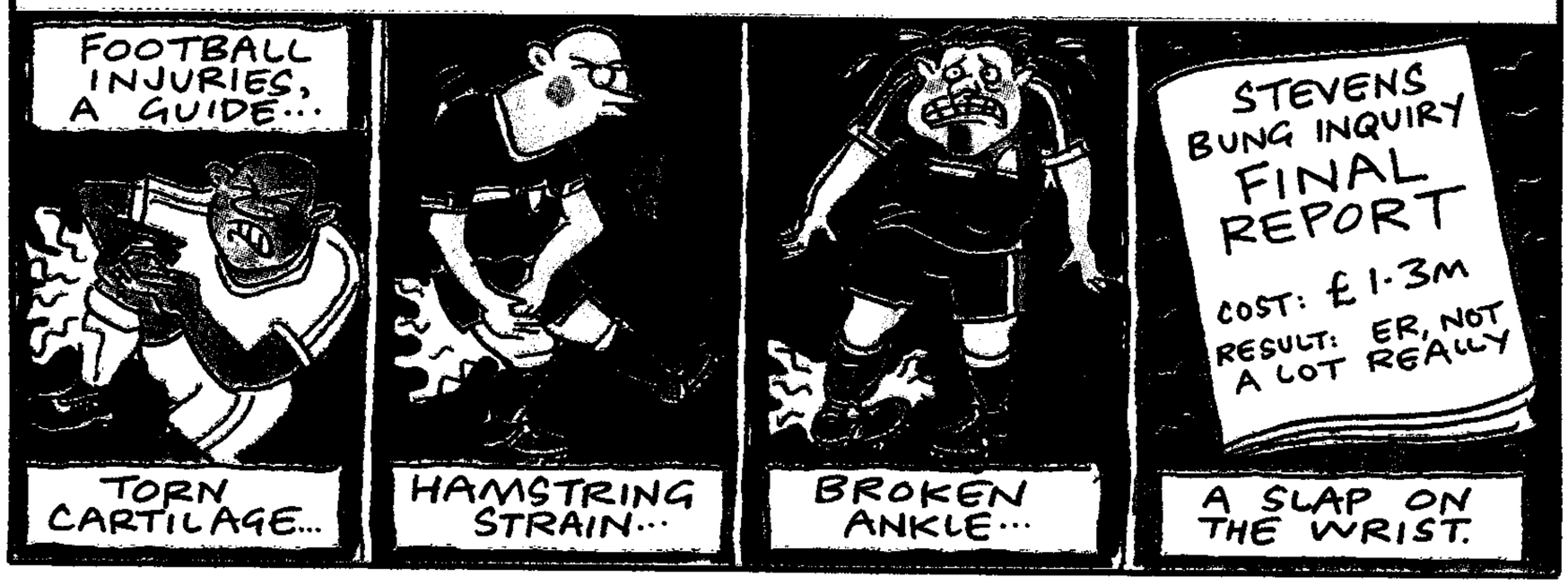
D'you see about these paedos, McGuv, you know what I'd do with them? Cut their balls off. And I tell you what, McGuv, a lot of them would thank you for it! Tell you something else, they're everywhere. Could be one living right next to you. There could be one in the back of my cab now. In fact, you could be one yourself. I'm not taking you anywhere with your filthy habits. Get out, you pervert, before I cut them off!

NEXT WEEK: Sid Snotter (Cab No. 2012) on the shortcomings in the design of the logo for the London Olympics, and the likelihood that his four-year-old son Dwayne could have produced a more acceptable image with his eyes closed.

CELEBRATIONS CONTINUE, AS BLACK PERSON DRIVING EXPENSIVE CAR IS NOT STOPPED BY POLICE

the PREMIERSH*TS

PAUL WOOD



ME AND MY SPOON

PRINCE HARRY

Your Royal Highness, we are extraordinarily grateful to you for giving up your valuable time to talk to us about spoons. And may I begin by asking you whether spoons have played an important part in your life?

Yeah, well, you know, speaking personally, I'd have to say, I mean, you know, whatever...

That's fascinating, Your Highness, and may I say again how thrilled we are to have you with us here on the Spoon column! Which brings me on to my second question: you are still a comparatively young man, but have you formed any attachment to a particular spoon that you would be willing to talk to us about?

Er, well, obviously, you know, these things are quite difficult to talk about. I mean, you've got to, really, you know, sort of...

That's wonderfully put, your Highness. And I can't help thinking at this point of your mother. Did she perhaps influence in any way your approach to spoons?

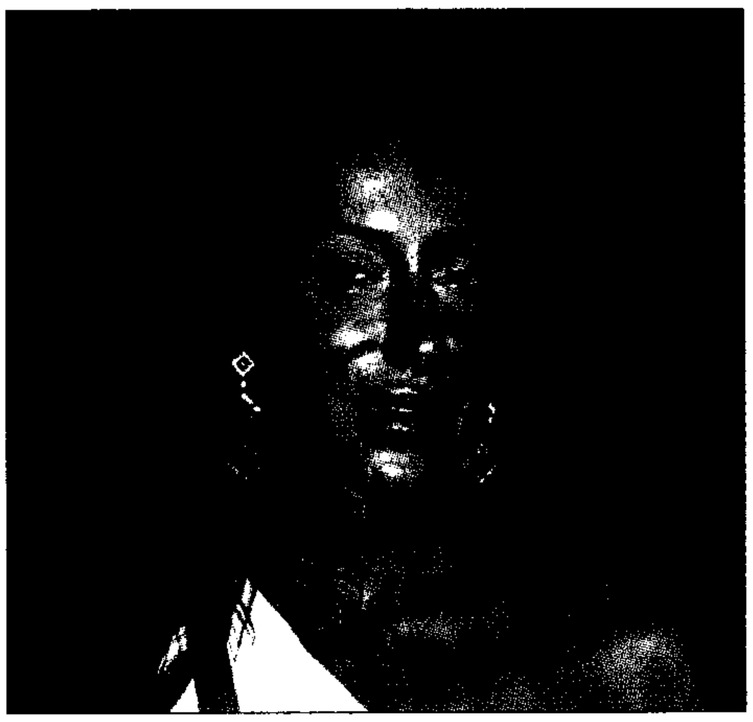
Well, yes, obviously, when you think about it, you know, I mean spoons, right, yeah... it's like how it is...

That's very moving, Your Highness, and I would like to thank you for sharing that very personal memory with us all. And may I end, as I always do, by asking you whether anything amusing has ever happened to you in connection with a spoon?

Yes, there was this night when we were all in Boujis, right, and Charlie Ricketson-Smythe drank, you know, three bottles of vodka and one of absinthe as a chaser, it was so funny, right, he got this spoon yeah and stuck it up Rupert's *(Sadly at this point a Royal Equerry intervened to explain that His Highness had been taken ill and would have to be returned to barracks immediately)*

NEXT WEEK: *Sir Alan Sugar – "Me and my sugar!"*

DIARY



NANCY DELL'OLIO

I was born under the sign of Virgo in the early 1970s. My world was about to be changed forever. Lying in that hospital cot, I felt the eyes of all the baby boys in that ward locked on to me. I could feel the white-hot laser of their stares.

How did I feel within myself? Yes, I felt the stirrings of a woman who knows she has the ability to ignite the passion of many strangers. You know what boys are like!

My destiny as a Virgo born in the late 1970s was to be very beautiful, intimately concerned with the fate of all mankind, formidably intelligent, an adored role model for the world, restless in my eternal quest for love and peace. This was my destiny – but also my burden.

I left that maternity ward with hundreds of fledgling men passionately in love with me. But sadly I knew that my destiny lay elsewhere. The wider world had too great a need for me, so I was honour-bound to disappoint them.

As I departed to the more glamorous world beyond, they could not hold back their bitter tears.

But I did not look back, for my destiny was with other, more distinguished males.

In our end is our beginning, and in my bottom is my worth.

I shall never forget the first time I met Sven. It was 1995. Barely out of my teenage years, my world was about to be changed forever.

It was at a very sophisticated party full of very, very important men, men of wisdom and experience, and their sadly resentful wives, who, behind their cold smiles, desperately yearned for the attention to fall upon them, not upon me.

Like a bolt from the sword of Thor, I felt those ice-blue Nordic eyes land on me from across the room. I was wearing a distinguished mini-skirt, with a tight open-top blouse overflowing with the grace and wisdom of my forebears.

I turned to see this brilliant, important man with the hard, thrusting spectacles of a Greek god.

I knew, as only a beautiful woman can, that in that split-second he was transfixed with a desire verging on obsession.

"How do you do" he said. "My name is Sven".

At this point, sex was out of the question. Was I not already happily married to someone else – a venerable old man with an extensive property portfolio?

But we must all follow our hearts, and where our heart leads us, sex will follow.

The man who called himself Sven put out his hand. Call it intuition, call it what you will, but I knew at that moment that what he desired most in the world was to shake it. And so I let him hold my hand and move it rhythmically up and down for seconds – seconds that to him must have seemed like hours.

I touched his hand. His hand touched mine. I was still in my teens.

Together we shook and shook and shook, until we could shake no more.

"May I be having the number of your telephone please for so as to contact you?" said Sven.

I could not hold back my tears!

This was madness!

But looking at Sven I could see that under that neat grey suit, a volcano was ready to erupt.

Without thinking, I wrote down my name on a piece of paper. As I did so, I noticed Sven's eyes following another woman – a woman dressed in a vulgar, attention-grabbing mini-skirt, anxious to sell her story for a vast amount of money – around the room. I had just finished writing my number when I heard Sven whisper to her:

"May I be having the number of your telephone please for so as to contact you?"

In that moment, my world was turned upside down. How could my Sven do this to me? My blood began to run hot and cold.

But my inner wisdom soon led me to the very heart of the matter, and within that wisdom I found much solace. You know what men are like! Yes! This was Sven's cry for attention: the more he chased after other women, the more desperate was his yearning for me! To me, Sven was a little boy who does something he knows will make his mother angry just to get her attention.

Without further ado, I held him by his ice-cold Nordic earlobe and led him kicking and screaming out of the room. As my venerable husband – or former husband, as he now was – watched us depart, he could not hold back the tears. Yes, I had once loved him – but as a Virgo my destiny lay elsewhere! I was eighteen years old, this was the end of the 1990s, and, with the World Cup beckoning, the world of international football was calling out for me.

When I heard the news of 9/11, shortly after my 21st birthday, I knew that these international terrorists would stop at nothing to get my attention.

I resolved then and there to bring about world peace. "With you by my side," I said to Sven in our luxury 5-star hotel suite, "I shall bring my never-ending quest for love and harmony to the world. Sven?...Sven?"

But Sven was nowhere to be seen. I eventually located him in the bathroom, where he was desperately trying to attract my attention by carrying on with the parlour-maid.

As a world, we are now also faced with the problem of climate change. The globe is growing hotter and hotter – and I blame myself. Are my dazzling designer outfits too sensual, too provocative? I must do whatever I can to calm it down, even if it involves the sacrifice of covering up my distinguished cleavage.

Yes, I have spent a lifetime searching for my personal meaning. My aim was to give to others, less fortunate than myself, a feeling of hope; and to bring about a global ceasefire.

I have achieved all these aims by agreeing to appear in full-colour photo-spreads in Hello! magazine on twelve separate occasions. Yes, it is hard work, but I am prepared to make these sacrifices for the rest of the human race. Sadly, I heard yesterday that the bitter fighting in Iraq has resumed. Once again, those insurgents are so upset that Sven has let me down. I do not hesitate. I telephone my good friend, the distinguished editor of OK!, and tell her that lives are at stake: there is nothing for it but an exclusive photoshoot in my skintight red silk dress with the plunging neckline. Ciao!

As told to

CRAIG BROWN

WE WERE BOTH VERY PRO-LABOUR WHEN THIS GOVERNMENT FIRST TOOK OVER. COOL BRITANNIA AND ALL THAT.
IT SEEMED SO RIGHT.
AND AFTER TEN YEARS OF LABOUR PROMISES, WHAT DO WE HAVE? WHAT ARE WE LEFT WITH?
A COUNTRY THAT'S RUN BY SPIN AND HEADLINE INITIATIVES! A PEOPLE RULED BY GLOSS AND P.R... !
I THINK IT'S GREAT, DON'T YOU DARLING?
ABSOLUTELY.

Literary Review

Money talks, bullshit writes

Tycoon
Peter Jones
(Hodder and Stoughton, £16.99)

TRADITIONALLY, the British don't like to talk about wealth. This may be because historically, the majority of extremely wealthy Britons have done precious little to earn it, save wait dutifully for Daddy to die.

With the growing influence of American cultural mores, however, where brazen cash-lust is a wholly acceptable part of the American Dream, all that has begun to change. "Entrepreneur" is no longer shorthand for a cocky chancer in a shiny suit and a Beemer. Gordon Brown has enshrined entrepreneurship as the lifeblood of our future economic strength. And much more important than Gordon Brown, it's all over the telly: the success of programmes like *Dragons' Den* and *The Apprentice* show that entrepreneurship is not just accepted now but applauded.

"Business is the new rock n' roll" is how self-styled ultrapreneur and *Dragons' Den* panellist Peter Jones frames the moment. Like most one-liners about the new rock n' roll, this is bunkum - business is not the new rock n' roll any more than badger-baiting is. But bunkum or otherwise, what Jones is trying to say is that making money is cool and anyone can do it.

Indeed, Jones's fellow dragon Duncan Bannatyne had a book out last year called precisely that - *Anyone Can Do It*, which came hot on the heels of *Anyone Can Do It* by the founders of Coffee Republic and Richard Branson's *Screw It, Let's Do It*. Jones's book *Tycoon*, which accompanies his ITV series, proffers the same elixir. According to Peter: "Anyone can become a Tycoon with the right mental attitude, the right idea and the stamina to succeed."

At this point we might do well to consider what "Doing It" means in this context because one notable feature of all of these books is their reluctance to come out and say where nirvana truly lies. We should be frank – "doing it" means getting filthy, stinking, bespoke-suit wearing, Cohiba-puffing, private-jet flying, feigned-interest in footballing, imaginary friendship with Elton John-ing, rich. Britons still have a problem admitting the actualities of their real desires, and so Jones and his ilk defumigate the stench of dirty lucre with shake 'n' vac euphemisms.

And yet the self-evident truth is that not anyone can "do it". You might need to have a bit of chutzpah to try it in the first place, a wad of someone else's cash and a some kind of idea, but you'll also need a whole lot of luck. There is no magic formula, and if there were, Peter Jones, while obviously a trifle self-deluded, wouldn't be foolish enough to flog it off in a hardback for a mere £16.99. So before you

even open Jones's, or indeed Felix Dennis's, Bannatyne's or Branson's largely similar tomes, the dreamy premise is flawed.

Given, then, that this is a dumb book from the outset, one might question the point of giving it a hearing. But read as a comedic loo-side diversion *Tycoon* is masterful. Interspersed with quotes from Einstein, Churchill and George Bernard Shaw (one can only imagine what Bernard Shaw would have made of Peter Jones), the aim of the book is to "define the mindset of a tycoon". Jones gives ten golden rules, expands on them with varying degrees of tautological inanity, and then summarises them in bullet points again at the end of the chapter.

It's all broken up with nuggety little "Tycoon Tips" like, "Aim high, think positive and make your vision long-sighted." And there was I thinking if I aimed low, thought negatively and only looked one step ahead, the Surrey mansion would be mine.

By the time you get to the section on "How To Trust Your Intuition" [sic] you start to wonder whether Jones's greatest gift lies not in business, but in parody. "The majority of people live in a tangible world. They base their thoughts, their life, their capabilities and their ambitions on what they can actually see. I, on the other hand, live in a visual world, basing my thoughts, life, capabilities and ambitions on what is possible; on what I can do, on what might be." Peter Jones made his millions in mobile phones, by the way.

Books & Bookmen

■ PUBLISHERS are already reeling at Waterstone's new ratecard listing how much it will charge to promote books in its shops this Christmas.

To have a book displayed at the front of each store will cost a publisher £25,000 – and that's before any additional discount the chain demands from the publisher on the books themselves.

Last year Waterstone's was charging only £5,000 for the same promotion. So what has prompted such a huge hike? In the intervening period Waterstone's has of course bought the Ottakars chain, a move publishers opposed for fear that just this very thing would happen. Several publishers are now considering boycotting the Waterstone's Christmas activity altogether.

To be fair to Waterstone's, every penny it claws in from publishers it spends on advertising and promoting books. But it doesn't always do so with much success. Its £1m TV campaign last Christmas proved a big disappointment for the chain and the publishers who helped pay for it. In fact it was such a letdown that when store managers were asked for feedback on Christmas 2006, many were advised not to mention the TV ads at all.

In the past Waterstone's has prided itself on the Paperbacks Of The Year promotion at Christmas, which customers imagine is, er, the pick of the year's best books. What many browsing the front-of-store tables this year won't realise, is that the retailer will only include a book there if the publisher forks out £7,000 for the privilege – plus a discount of around 60 percent of course!

■ THE strange ways of the €100,000 Impac Dublin Literary Award should be well-known by now, yet this preposterous contest is still taken seriously.

The most lucrative prize for a single work of fiction published in English has a simple modus operandi: put literary giants on the shortlist, tantalising them with the sum they could win; but then with Celtic cheek choose as winner either a middle-ranking British or Irish novelist (Andrew Miller, Nicola Barker, Colm Toibin) or an obscure author published in translation who is then never heard of again (Herta Muller, Tahir Ben Jalloun).

This year's shortlisted galacticos were Julian Barnes, JM Coetzee, Cormac McCarthy and Salman Rushdie; but inevitably the vast purse was trousered last week by Norway's Per Petterson, with salt added to the giants' wounds by the fact that his winning novel was originally published back in 2003 (bizarre eligibility rules are another Impac absurdity). In this case, even the usual rationale of introducing little-known authors to a wider audience doesn't apply: the kind of reader who laps up continental novels will already know Petterson, as the same book was the winner of last year's Independent Foreign Fiction Prize.

■ PAPERBACKS normally sell far more copies than hardbacks, but publishers customarily treat them disdainfully – failing to update them where necessary, leaving mistakes uncorrected, even adding new ones.

This couldn't-care-less attitude is exemplified by Simon & Schuster's paperback of *Boris*, Andrew Gimson's Boris Johnson biography. When Johnson becomes MP for Henley, Gimson notes, "the picture of him yawning which adorns the front cover of this book" was taken during the count. But his paperback editor has changed the cover, replacing the famous yawning image, without knowing the book well enough to realise it had to be changed too.

"Well, Simon & Schuster are, um, shit," said another of their authors stoically, when told of this blunder.

■ "HARPERCOLLINS must be regretting their decision to fork out £500,000 for a two-book deal to Lionel Shriver," sniped the *Sunday Telegraph*'s books diary, noting that with only 2,500 sales of Shriver's *The Post-Birthday World*, the deal worked out to £100 per book.

Another costly deal, likely also regretted, was surely being slated too: Shriver's contract with sister

Private Eye's Worstseller Chart

Position	Author	Title	Publisher	Reported advance	Sales to date	Cost of advance per book	Copies needed to sell to make back advance
1	Sheldon Bowles	*Kingdomality: An Ingenious New Way To Triumph In Management*	Vermilion	£100,000	385	£259.74	84,033
2	Iain Duncan Smith	*The Devil's Tune*	Robson Books	£2,500	969	£3.59	1,295
3	Sabrina Broadbent	*Descent*	Vintage	£50,000	1,284	£38.94	46,728
4	Edwina Currie	*Diaries*	Time Warner	£100,000	9,309	£10.74	60,606
5	Graham Norton	*So Me*	Hodder	£250,000	87,627	£2.85	193,798

Notes: Advances as reported in national press and at www.publishersmarketplace.com which is where publishers and agents report their own deals. Sales to date are correct as of this week on Nielsen Bookscan's official chart data site.

paper the *Daily Telegraph* as chief fiction critic. How very disloyal.

■ INDY hack and literary boulevardier John "Guest Bedroom" Walsh must have been pleasantly surprised to find his new novel, Sunday at the Crossbones, included in the paper's recent guide to "50 Best Holiday Reads".
Or perhaps not: he himself helped compile the list. At number 22, Walsh's novel ranked above Middlemarch, The Age of Innocence and The Go-Between, naturally.

'Bookworm'

The Swindon Festival of Literature just keeps getting better. This year there is over 100 authors, speakers and events in just 13 days.

Swindon Festival of Literature

Father dead

The Dads' Book
Michael Heatley
(Michael O'Mara Books, £9.99)

The Pocket Dangerous Book For Boys: Things To Do
Conn Iggulden & Hal Iggulden
(HarperCollins, £10)

DON'T forget Father's Day! Sunday June 17th!" screams the sign in the shop window. But how could we? This essentially meaningless celebration, the ultimate Hallmark Holiday, has mutated in recent years into yet another excuse for people to go shopping and buy stuff. And nowhere is this more apparent than in bookshops.

The publishing trade, usually so dozy, has embraced Father's Day with uncharacteristic relish. All the chains have their special "dad" areas, with dumpbins full of titles about World War II and the SAS, as well as DIY manuals and all the footballers' autobiographies no one bought last Christmas. For men, as all women know, are impossible to buy for, and what better present can there be than a book? Even if the chances of them actually reading it are relatively slender.

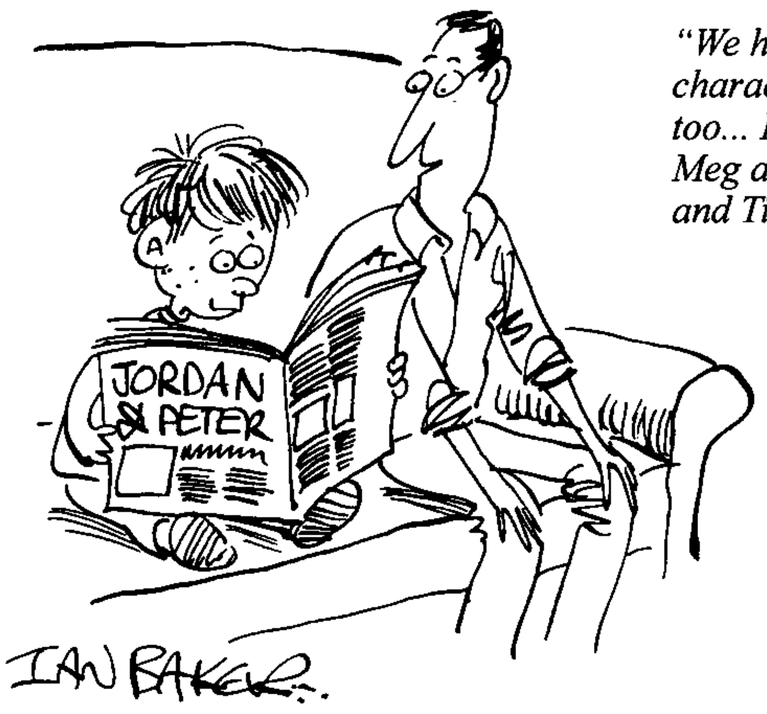
The main cause of all this excitement in publishing circles was the extraordinary success last year of The Dangerous Book For Boys, Conn and Hal Iggulden's playful rewrite of Baden-Powell for the 99.99 percent of the population who had never read him. Published just in time for Father's Day, and cleverly packaged to tap into a nostalgia market that no one knew existed, the book has simply never stopped selling. Indeed, it did so well over Christmas that it could be said to have shifted thinking on how you publish books for Christmas. (Unless you have a star name attached or it's a TV tie-in, books like these will start coming out earlier in the year, hoping to establish themselves in the marketplace before the seasonal horrors begin. In other words, from now on, a Christmas book isn't just for Christmas.)

And so, as inevitably as heartburn after a late-night pizza, come the rip-offs and cash-ins, both from the Igguldens themselves and anybody else who conspicuously lacks shame.

Michael Heatley, best-known for speedwriting scissor-and-paste biographies of John Peel and Ricky Gervais, has knocked together The Dad's Book: For The Dad Who's Best At Everything for those legendary chancers at Michael O'Mara Books. It's an outstandingly lazy and opportunistic piece of work, so similar to the Igguldens' book in appearance that it can only be aimed at bookshop customers with very poor eyesight or only the shakiest notion of what they are supposed to be buying. Among the book's "clever tips and practical advice" is a list of 10 recommended board games to play (chess, ludo and Monopoly are there, you'll be delighted to know, but there's no room for Totopoly or the Mouse Trap game), A Dad's Guide to the Internet (says all the usual things), Pocket Money - What It Will Cost You! (lots), and Top Tips For A Stress-Free Morning ("Prepare and refrigerate packed lunches the previous night"). Had it been written with any wit or told you anything you didn't know already, there might have been some point to this book. As it is, fathers who received this on Father's Day may not have been in the best of tempers for the rest of the weekend.

Heatley, of course, is just trying to make a living. (Among the 100 or so titles he has written in 30 years is Rolf Harris: The Most Talented Man In the World). The Igguldens have less of an excuse. The Dangerous Book For Boys did well at least partly because it's a terrific book. A year or so down the line we might expect a paperback, but instead we get a "pocket" hardback version of about half of the original book's content. This year it's Things To Do; next year, in a companion volume, it'll be Things To Know. Each one takes the relevant material from the original book and adds a smidgen of new stuff, effectively trying to tempt anyone who bought the original to buy it again for 10 quid. It's like the greatest hits album with the one new track.

Coming in the autumn in a fetching blue cover will be The Dangerous Book For Boys Yearbook, including such useful tips as "How To Scrape Barrels" and "How To Dissipate Any Goodwill You Have Previously Managed To Build Up". Ah yes, the good old publishing industry: they'll always find some way to muck it up.



"We had cartoon characters in my day too... Peter and Jane, Meg and Mog, Topsy and Tim"

TINABALLS

■ "I FELT the book had to hit a standard or I'd regret it," Tina Brown informed the *New York Times* last week, puffing her new book *The Diana Chronicles*. "It had to have some endurance, to enable me to make a quantum leap, to take me into a different area."

The different area into which she has leapt may seem oddly familiar to anyone who has followed the Diana saga – as will the "revelations" being touted by Tina and her publishers. Former flunkey William "Backstairs Billy" Tallon, for instance, has "broken his lifelong rule never to talk about the royals" to disclose that on the eve of her wedding Diana rode round on his bike singing "I'm going to marry the Prince of Wales tomorrow". As Craig Brown pointed out in last weekend's *Mail on Sunday*, Tallon told the same story to biographer Sarah Bradford for her *Diana*, published last year.

Most of Tina's other "scoops" can also be found in the Bradford book, such as Prince Philip's threat to take Diana's title away if she didn't behave (attributed by Tina to "a close adviser of the princess"), or the claim that Diana didn't deliberately throw herself down the stairs at Sandringham but merely tripped.

Some have an even more ancient pedigree, such as Tina's alleged discovery that Prince Charles likes his lovers to call him "Arthur" at moments of sexual ecstasy. "I thought: this is too hilarious. I have to put it in," she told the *Washington Post*. And no less hilarious than when it first appeared in Nigel Dempster's *Daily Mail* diary on 17 May 1993, and in countless books and TV documentaries since then.

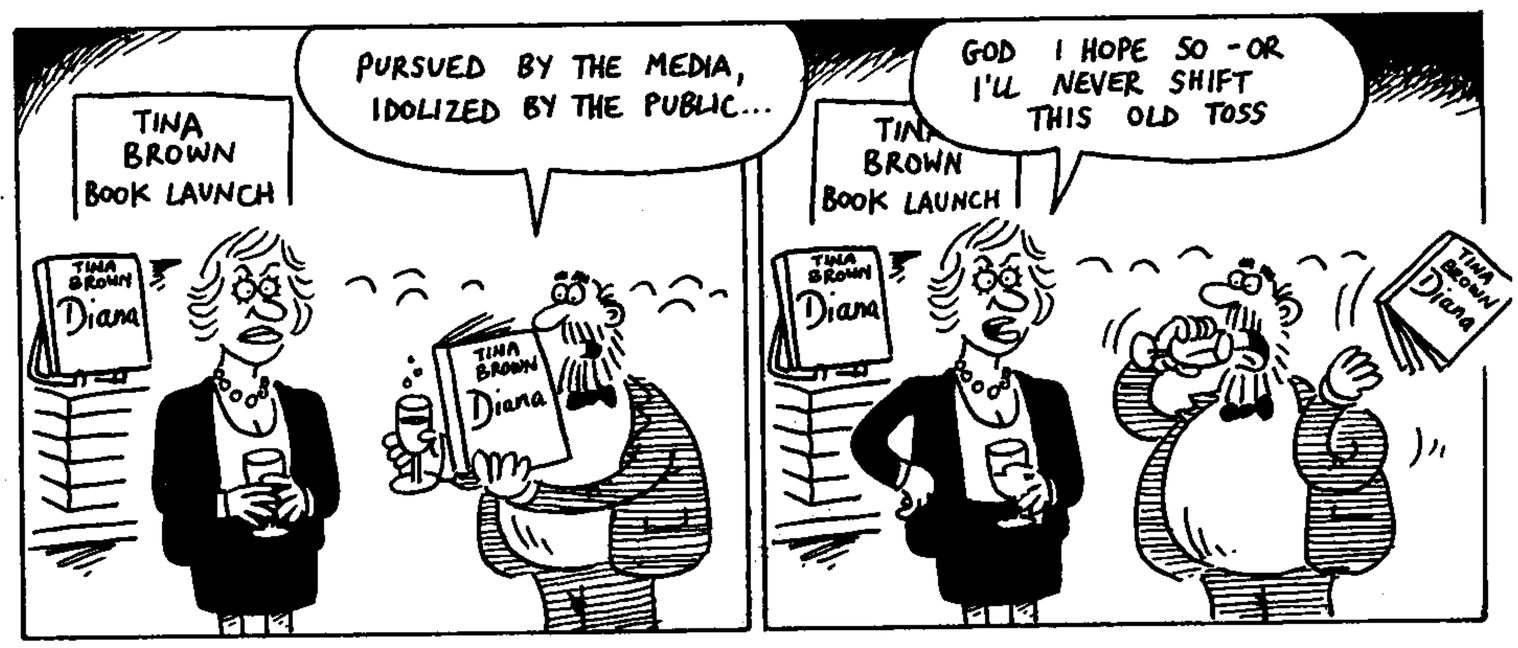
Still, there is one detail in *The Diana Chronicles* that can fairly be called new. "A gossip industry flowered on the nation's decay of self-esteem," Tina writes. "The apotheosis of the British style and mood was the weekly *Private Eye*."

No doubt we shall have more to report in next week's issue...

JUST FANCY THAT

"Every time Princess Diana's ghost returns for another haunting, as it did this week on NBC's *Dateline*, our perceptions of her change. The only thing that stays the same is the revolving cast of clapped-out courtiers, posh low-lifes and fleabag turncoats who continue to cash in on her memory... Patrick Jephson, the princess's erstwhile private secretary, who published a rancid memoir in 2000... Paul Burrell, the whispering butler... bio-porn king Andrew Morton..." – Tina Brown, *Washington Post*, 2 December 2004.

"Our knowledge of Diana owes much to the writings of Andrew Morton, whose *Diana: Her True Story...* remains one of the greatest publishing scoops ever. He has been most helpful to me. So has Patrick Jephson. *Shadows of a Princess*, his memoir of his eight years as Diana's equerry and then private secretary, is replete with intriguing observations as well as an insider's perspective... Paul Burrell's two memoirs, too, have much touching detail to commend them." – Tina Brown's acknowledgements in *The Diana Chronicles*, 2007.


TINA BROWN BOOK LAUNCH
PURSUED BY THE MEDIA, IDOLIZED BY THE PUBLIC...
TINA BROWN Diana
GOD I HOPE SO - OR I'LL NEVER SHIFT THIS OLD TOSS

Pseuds Corner

Movie legends Al Pacino and Robert De Niro are to share the big screen for only the second time in their careers, according to film trade paper Variety.

This is an event in world history,' said co-producer Avi Lerner in Cannes.

BBC Website

Snooker is a kinetic sculpture, at once thrilling and calming, soporific and compelling. The play of colours – red against green, with black and white for ever both inseparable and in opposition – is a lovely thing. The long safety exchanges, often more compelling than mere breaks, have a rhythm and a sound that adds to the sumptuous play of the colours. This is sport as abstract art.

SIMON BARNES
The Times

Then along came two immensely tall young men – giants – who stripped away the old surface, loaded the detritus into plastic bags, dug up and smoothed the under-surface, and then with exquisite precision laid down the new billiard table. It took them two days of intense industry and impressive skill. I was reminded of Das Rheingold and the two giants, Fasolt and Fafner, building Valhalla as a new home for the gods.

PAUL JOHNSON watches turf being re-laid, *Spectator*

The Beatles' longevity can be explained by the fact that their music creates subtle and rewarding schematic violations of popular musical forms, causing a symphony of neural firings from the cerebellum to the prefrontal cortex.

DANIEL J. LEVITIN
Guardian

While immersed in a Cave lyric, it's easy to believe not only in full temporal simultaneity – the indigenes are hacked to death, even as a football is kicked across the oval – but also that this sepia land marches with ancient Israel itself, both the Pharisees and the Kelly Gang having been clamped by the neck for the time necessary to secure a group portrait.

WILL SELF on Nick Cave, *Guardian*

Pseuds Educational

IQEA is set to synchronize compelling synergies among institutions, instructors, students and their respective parents, to further develop their eminence and cohesively mount standards of education qualitatively. The Association aims to enhance revolutionary practices by empowering the platform for students to raise global individualized acknowledgement for their attributed capabilities.

From the International Quality Education Association website

CONTRIBUTORS: Everyone, Tim Freeman, Rupert Redway, David George, Mark Higgie, Alison Denton.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

IRAQ SECURITY

The battle goes to court

AS IRAQ implodes and private security contractors find themselves increasingly exposed on the frontline (witness the recent kidnapping of four British guards working for the Canadian firm Garda World), different battle lines are now opening up in the US courts for two of the leading British private security companies (PSCs).

They are competing for renewal of the biggest private security deal in Iraq: the US Reconstruction Security Support Services contract, a $475m, two-year deal that will put the winner in charge of all PSCs operating in Iraq.

The contract involves running Iraq's Reconstruction Operations Centres which coordinate and track the movements of PSCs and issue security warnings. The deal also includes providing security escorts and guards for top coalition staff.

Aegis v. Armor: Soames (left) and his old boss Rifkind

The current contract is still being run by Tim Spicer's Aegis; but his firm faces a stiff challenge from Britain's Armor Group for the renewal. In an intriguing aside, this in effect pits one top British Tory against another. Nicholas Soames, former Armed Forces Minister, is now a director of Aegis, while Sir Malcolm Rifkind, Soames's one-time ministerial boss as John Major's Defence Secretary, chairs Armor Group.

Tory rivalries apart, the competition for the next tranche of Iraq security loot has been joined by two other outfits: Erinys Iraq, a firm with South African origins but currently led by British ex-officers (see *Eyes passim*); and America's Blackwater, the company whose guards were killed in such horrific fashion outside Fallujah in 2004.

When the bids from Erinys and Blackwater were rejected by the US military, both lodged formal protests which automatically held up the award of the contract for six months while the US General Accounting Office (GAO) considers their protests.

To complicate matters further, this process was then itself derailed by a court case launched in the US by a former serviceman called Brian Scott. He asked a judge to rule that the entire notion of the contract was illegal because the use of hired guns by the US government breaches something called the "Anti Pinkerton Act".

In the late 19th century, the Pinkerton detective agencies frequently helped break strikes in America. The 1893 law, passed after "Pinkerton" men shot dead several trade unionists, apparently outlaws the US government's use of mercenaries. To general surprise, a judge in the US Court of Federal Claims allowed Scott's suit, halting the bid protests in their tracks.

The GAO told the *Eye* it would only resume its bid investigations if Scott's lawsuit is quashed in court, which the US army will try to do next month. Despite this, Erinys has launched its own legal action against Scott's complaint. Court papers from that case show that Erinys has attacked other bidders for offering "low-priced proposals" and suggested, among other things, that Blackwater is too quick to shoot, too aggressive and too ready to level weapons at Iraqi security forces.

While Erinys is in court, other British firms clearly think influence is more important. The Armor Group must be pleased that the current number two in the CIA, Stephen Kappes, was its US sales director for a year. Meanwhile Spicer has hired Kristi Clemens to lobby for it in Washington. She was a spokeswoman for Paul Bremer, the US viceroy of Iraq, before becoming a Republican political appointment in the US Department of Homeland Security. She left that job after her PR plan was criticised because it seemed designed to get President Bush re-elected (by making unsubstantiated claims that "America is safer today") rather than reflect the facts of US security.

Spicer has also hired Robert MacFarlane as a director. He worked for President Ronald Reagan, helping run the notorious "Iran Contra" operation. He was later found guilty of misleading Congress over the affair and attempted suicide with a Valium overdose. But President Bush Snr later pardoned him. Given the number of Iran Contra veterans who have surfaced in Bush Jnr's administration, MacFarlane is a useful contact for Spicer. The advantage to Iraqis of all these legal battles and struggles for influence are rather less clear.

COUNTRYSIDE PROPERTIES

One in the Eye

MORE THAN two years after the *Eye* exposed Countryside Properties' dodgy plan to build 650 homes on the site of the world's largest asbestos textile factory, the developer has pulled out.

Since March 2005, *Private Eye* has chronicled Countryside's misleading attempts to convince locals that the 72-acre site in the Spodden Valley, near Rochdale, is safe, and not seriously contaminated with the asbestos that was processed there for more than 100 years.

In January 2005, Ian Simpson, director of Countryside Properties Northern, told local hacks that the asbestos was "capped underground". But the *Eye* proved this was nonsense when we filmed workmen removing exposed asbestos from the site two months later (*Eye* 1129). As a result the Health and Safety Executive launched an investigation.

Next we reported that the developer's assurances, and those of their local partner MMC, were contrary to the advice of the site manager who had identified significant exposed asbestos in September 2004 – months before a planning application for the site was filed which claimed that "of particular note is the absence of any asbestos contamination" (*Eye* 1139).

Eventually Countryside apologised and produced a newsletter to ease concern about its shifty dealing. But this was itself full of codswallop. In May 2006, the Advertising Standards Authority agreed with us, ruling that CP was "misleading" and in breach if the ASA's code in areas of "substantiation", "honesty" and "truthfulness" (*Eye* 1158).

Countryside Properties

Countryside refuses to comment on its withdrawal but its partner MMC issued a statement saying: "Countryside Properties became disillusioned with the apparent unwillingness of the town planning department to deal with the application as a result of the ill-founded and negative publicity". Oh yeah? Feral media alert!

MMC alleged local campaigners were responsible for "uninformed scaremongering" and that if they don't get to develop the site it will remain a "contaminated eyesore on the face of Rochdale in eternity".

In the meantime, one hopes that the Royal Bank of Scotland, which loaned MMC millions of pounds to develop the site, is content for it be secured against a "contaminated eyesore". And no doubt MMC's failure to file up-to-date accounts with Companies House is all the media's fault too!

CUSTODY DEATH

Radio waves

A HIGH COURT judge has ordered a fresh inquest into the death of Malcolm Cash, a young mentally ill man who died after being held face down in the mud in his garden by five police officers.

Concern over the way the Northampton coroner, Ann Pember, conducted the first inquest was raised in the *Eye* in March last year. Now Mr Justice Keith has ruled that she was wrong to deny the inquest jury the right to consider whether police had used unreasonable force and whether Mr Cash had been unlawfully killed.

He also ruled that it was wrong to prevent the jury from bringing in a "narrative verdict" which could reflect any concern they may have had over police conduct. Ms Pember allowed the jurors a choice of only an open or accidental verdict and they opted for the latter.

In July 2002 police went to support an ambulance crew who had been called to the home Mr Cash shared with his girlfriend in Wellingborough. Mr Cash had taken sleeping pills, slashed his wrist with a razorblade and was already unsteady on his feet and slurring his words. He had told his girlfriend that "he had done it properly this time", that he didn't want an ambulance and would be violent if one turned up. By the time the ambulance crew arrived, however, the razorblade was in his back pocket and he was begging his girlfriend to stay with him when police decided to "take him down".

Officers said they were concerned Mr Cash may have harmed his girlfriend or himself and that they held him down for no longer than 30 to 90 seconds. Other witnesses said it was longer and that officers had knelt on him. He was given no warning.

The ambulance crew attempted to resuscitate Mr Cash but he never recovered consciousness. The two paramedics described Mr Cash as verbally aggressive but agreed he was not violent. One said the way he had been held on the floor did not seem to be "excessive or different" from the way he had seen people being arrested before and both said they were surprised at the speed at which he had become comatose. However, a friend, Lisa Winsor, said she had not thought the police would be as "fierce" as they had been: "You could see he (Cash) wasn't going to hurt anyone. He was so weak," she said.

Mr Cash died from a "terminal lack of oxygen", although the pathologist, Prof Guy Rutty, concluded that even if he had been deprived of oxygen while being held face down in the mud, his death was not attributable to that alone. The drugs he had taken, although not usually a fatal dose, could trigger a fatal disorder of the beating of the heart, particularly if coupled with stress.

Eye readers may recall that one police officer was recorded on his police radio stating to his head office: "He's schizophrenic, he's violent, he's hostile. We jump on him. We end up ground pinning him... Between five of us to restrain... he's in the ambulance now but he's looking like he's going to brown bread it mate [die].

"When we get back, I want to grab everybody that was in at the start 'cos we're going to have to make sure that we fucking scribble this up properly."

Mr Justice Keith said it would have been for the jury to decide if this was a "callous indifference" to what had happened to Mr Cash and an attempt by police to cover their tracks or "simply inappropriate language" on the part of the officer who "realized how sensitive a death in custody was, who knew it would be investigated properly and wanted to ensure the paperwork was completed thoroughly". Something for the jury to consider later this year.

DEEPCUT

From cock-up to cover-up

NO WONDER Surrey police refused to publish the full findings of a critical report on their re-investigation into the deaths of four young recruits who died of gunshot wounds at the Deepcut army barracks in Surrey (see *Eyes passim*).

A document released under the Freedom of Information Act last week shows that the secret report by Devon and Cornwall police concluded that the investigation into the deaths should have been treated as a murder inquiry – something Surrey police consistently failed to do.

Taken with what is known about the Devon and Cornwall inquiry – the six-page summary published in 2005, which concluded that the Surrey investigation into all four deaths was muddled and divided – and "cock-up" begins to look like "cover-up".

A written and dated set of "initial strategic aims", apparently from Surrey police, was unearthed which said: "Slowly turn media focus away from murder, turn spotlight of criticism on to the army and move from how they died to why." Which explains why, as part of the investigation, Surrey launched a wide-ranging inquiry into the causes of suicide in the army – against the advice of senior detectives.

Coupled with an army email uncovered by the families, which carried similar sentiments ("Police admitted that the investigation will have the same result – suicide"), it suggests the re-investigation was not as "open minded" as Surrey has claimed.

Now parents of the recruits want to know why Devon and Cornwall police believe a murder inquiry was needed from the start, and why this was not seized upon by Nicholas Blake QC when he wrote his report into the affair. As the *Eye* reported, Blake did disclose new evidence from eyewitnesses who had changed their accounts of how two of the recruits died.

When, after the Blake inquiry, the *Eye* produced its special report on the Deepcut affair, Des James, father of Cheryl, the second recruit to die at the barracks in 1995, said: "Was it suicide? Who the hell cares? Deepcut was so out of control, bullying and abuse so rife, that young vulnerable recruits people were bound to die."

Mr James, who previously had kept an open mind about whether or not his daughter had committed suicide, has now changed his mind. "I believe Cheryl may have been murdered and that the evidence for this lies in the very reports we have been prevented from seeing. Had it been treated as a murder investigation from the start, evidence would have been preserved instead of destroyed, witnesses would have been interviewed under caution – and we just might have discovered what had happened."

DEPORTATION

Just not British

IN THE years since he arrived in Britain from Kosovo after fleeing the Serbian invasion in 1998, Perparim Demaj has learned English, trained in social care and nursing and found employment with Manchester city council as a community worker helping people with HIV/Aids.

It is a job he desperately wants to do and the city needs him – it recently had to recruit social workers from Canada for the vital but badly-paid work. So why has the social services department had to hold his job open for the last three years while pleading with the Home Office to give Mr Demaj a work permit and allow him to stay in the UK?

Mr Demaj was told in 2004 that the Home Office had withdrawn his right to work and, despite numerous appeals by himself and his employer, he still hasn't got it back. Val Stevens, deputy leader of the city council, has described Mr Demaj as "a valued employee and member of society" and says the council is extremely disappointed by the Home Office's continued refusal to let him stay and work in the city. If he were allowed to stay and return to work, the council says it would like to train him as a full social worker.

"I am still in touch with my former manager and the staff there. They know that if I received good news from the Home Office then the very

Perparim and Unison rep Wendy Allison

next day I would be at the city council personnel office," Mr Demai told the *Eye*. "I loved my job."

Town hall union Unison has also backed the Perparim Demaj Must Stay campaign and his Unison rep Wendy Allison recently ran the Manchester marathon to raise funds for it. Lawyers are currently putting together yet another application to the Home Office.

In a happier turn of events, in January 2005 Mr Demaj discovered that his wife Albana and their two sons, who he had believed may have been killed in Kosovo, were not only alive but were living in Ashton, Greater Manchester, having escaped to Montenegro before seeking asylum in the UK.

The couple were reunited and have since had a baby girl. When they applied for a family amnesty the Home Office said they couldn't have one because they weren't living as a family unit in 2003.

Under the family's current status they must sign in with the immigration service every month and could be detained and deported at any time. Mr Demaj is not allowed to work or claim benefit (despite having paid tax and national insurance for the four and a half years that he was working).

Despite the latest round of government initiatives to tackle integration (by introducing Britishness tests and cutting translation services), it still seems hellbent on deporting a man once described by Manchester council leader Richard Leese as "the sort of citizen we would want all our citizens to be".

FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS...

■ **LEGAL AID:** Figures from the Legal Services Commission show that government reform of fixed fee legal aid will create a big gap between winners and losers, with some law firms more than doubling their income.

This won't be because they take on any more cases or put in any more hours, but because the new flat rate system rewards those who handle quick, simple cases requiring minimum effort.

Thus one firm in Manchester, which billed the commission for £48,500 last year, will now be paid more than three times that - £160,488 – for the same work. Another firm in Liverpool will more than double its legal aid income from £141,265 to £332,876 for the same work, while in Cardiff three firms could boost their legal aid income by more than £50,000 for the same caseload.

Thus there is a new built-in incentive for solicitors to do as little work as possible on as many cases as possible – just like in old days of the discredited "green form" scheme (flat fee for two hours advice).

THE HOSPITAL REPORT THEY DIDN'T WANT YOU TO READ...

PFI, the untold story

A DAMNING report on hospitals built under the private finance initiative, prepared by the National Audit Office (NAO) but never published or shown to Parliament, has been obtained by *Private Eye* under the Freedom of Information Act.

In 2005 the NAO announced that it was looking into the record of PFI hospitals, but a year ago mysteriously cancelled the study – without revealing that it had already written a hugely detailed 90-page report on the subject. The move came just weeks after Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt had announced a review of the £12bn worth of hospital PFI deals then in the pipeline, in the face of mounting evidence that PFI was unaffordable and unworkable with other Labour health reforms. The last thing she needed was a critical report on the record of the PFI hospitals already up and running.

The NAO insists it was not pressured into pulling the report, entitled *The operational record of the first wave of PFI hospitals*, though it refuses to disclose any details of its discussions with the Department of Health on the subject. It claims the "evidence collected was too mixed and not sufficiently conclusive to justify a report to parliament". Really? *Eye* readers (and MPs) are invited to study the principal findings and judge for themselves:

THE 'RISK' FACTOR

In all 17 hospitals whose costs were looked at, PFI was judged to be a few pounds cheaper when compared to how much it would have cost to build or refurbish the hospital under conventional procurement. But at 15 hospitals this was only after a spurious financial "risk factor" had been applied to the public sector alternative. The factor varied from 1 percent to 22 percent of the cost but was always just enough to make PFI look cheaper. The NAO overlooks the obvious fiddling and swallows the alleged "similarity of costs" without question.

NOT SO GRAND DESIGNS

A comparison of design quality found the PFI hospitals, overall, slightly worse than non-PFI ones. On five out of six criteria they were below "minimum acceptable standard" and especially pisspoor architecturally. Although the non-PFI ones used for comparison were mostly 20 to 30 years older and much work has been done on improving hospital building standards in the meantime, this seems to have passed the PFI industry by.

BED-HOPPING MAD

Seventy percent of the PFI hospitals had *fewer* beds than the facilities they replaced, but all save one had higher rates of bed occupancy. Indeed, in 70 percent of cases the PFI bed occupancy rate was higher than the officially recommended maximum of 85 percent. Above this figure peak admissions are more difficult to handle, men and women can't always be separated and infection control is compromised.

The cause of the problem, the NAO found, was that "greater efficiency designed to increase patient throughput... has not yet been fully achieved." In other words, such is the expense of PFI that in order to produce a remotely affordable deal, unrealistic assumptions about needing fewer beds were made (with the help of financial consultants anxious to get the deal through and secure their success fees).

Three of the PFI hospitals have already had to build extra facilities as a result, putting millions more on the cost of their deals every year. Clinicians are understandably miffed: two thirds said that "affordability constraints" had led to "design compromise", including at University Hospital Durham where floor area had to be reduced, leading to "shortage of space... and a lack of ventilation".

FEELING THE HEAT

"One particular problem", the auditors noted, "is summer overheating". PFI hospitals fall well below minimum standards. "At one PFI hospital the contract manager had recently recorded temperatures of over 40°C in the wards during the height of summer," said the auditors. As the whole premise of PFI and the dodgy value for money calculations is the transfer of risk, solving this problem might be thought to be down to the PFI company. But no. When the auditors visited "it had not been agreed who would bear the cost".

CLEANING UP

Among the most alarming findings was that "the cost of cleaning PFI hospitals is higher than in non-PFI hospitals and the quality of service is lower". Not exactly surprising, but with clear evidence that poor hygiene standards increase the incidence of MRSA, *C. difficile* and other deadly super bugs – exactly the sort of finding Hewitt would not have wanted splashed across the papers last year.

The problem isn't just cost-cutting by the PFI companies and the cleaning firms they employ: the report noted that "only a fifth of ward managers at PFI hospitals... had sufficient powers of direction over cleaners". And in the bureaucratic nightmare of PFI, doing something about it isn't easy either because improved standards "are not necessarily reflected in the service specification", ie contract.

Making improvements is "likely to require the requesting of a service variation". Great news for lawyers, not so comforting for patients.

FAILURE? FINE BY US...

When things go wrong it's invariably the hospital, not the PFI company, that suffers. Two thirds of hospital managers felt that they couldn't impose sufficient financial penalties on the companies to motivate the PFI company to do its job.

And that's if difficulties are reported in the first place. Many problems go unpunished as busy nurses have better things to do than hang on the phone to a remote help-desk: "They would often therefore either ignore the failure or deal with it themselves," say the auditors, with the result that only 30 percent of trusts report "most" service failures. Even if they do, the PFI companies determine how much to fine themselves: "The data for calculating deductions is usually generated by the helpdesk and is therefore the responsibility of the PFI contractor."

When whole areas of PFI hospitals become unavailable most trusts think the payments they can withhold aren't enough to make the PFI company return the building to use quickly. In one case, a water leak shut an operating theatre for two days at a loss of 33 operations and a cost to the trust of £24,750. The PFI company was docked less than £5,000.

RED TAPE, RED FACES

Anyone who thinks the public sector is tied up in red tape should look at what happens when a PFI hospital needs the private company it's relying on to make any changes.

If it needs a new noticeboard, say, it can't just ask a handyman to put one up. It has to get a quote for "supply and fit and life cycle maintenance" (£860 for five of them from one PFI company, since you ask). The NAO report leaves a large space for a "flow diagram of the process for making a minor change". Unsurprisingly clinicians reported infuriating delays. And it's not cheap: at Norfolk and Norwich 1,600 "minor works" (putting up a shelf, changing a plug, etc) came in at £1.2m – £750 a throw. For any bigger change, like altering the use of a room, the process is more cumbersome still. And if it costs more than £5,000, the lawyers and even bankers have to be pulled in as their "risk profile" might be affected.

As a trust manager from Durham put it: "It is not a competitive market, the mark-up by the contractor and the [PFI company] increase the costs, and there is not the incentive for them to come up with affordable solutions..."

AND THE GOOD NEWS IS...

It's not all bad news. On the odd incidental like "security" PFI hospitals were judged better. And the report repeats the Treasury's favoured view of PFI: "The first wave of PFI hospitals were very largely delivered to time and budget."

Yet again, however, this conclusion is based on the cost of the hospitals once the contract was signed, after which it can't go up. If the prices when the deals were given the go-ahead were considered, a more appropriate comparison, the auditors would have seen increases of between 40 percent and 230 percent as huge price increases emerged during contract negotiations.

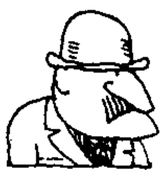
Despite the evidence of innumerable surveys, reviews, field visits to hospitals, independently commissioned technical evaluations, questionnaires and focus groups, at a cost of hundreds of thousands of pounds, Parliament, apparently, doesn't need to know about the bed shortages, sub-standard buildings, poor cleaning, labyrinthine bureaucracy and extra costs that come with PFI.

Patricia Hewitt's own review of hospital PFI deals duly concluded that, subject to some trimming here and there, they could go ahead. Nobody was able to point to damning NAO findings that PFI is about as useful in a hospital as a surgeon with the shakes.

PACKING 'EM IN Hospital beds before and after PFI

Hospital trust	Beds pre-PFI	Beds post-PFI	Occupancy pre-PFI (%)	Occupancy post-PFI (%)
Dartford & Gravesham	475	429	86	94
West Middlesex	246	216	87	92
Bromley	533	525	84	91
Swindon & Marlborough	600	544	71	91
Worcestershire	483	474	80	91
Barnet & Chase Farm	459	459	88	90
Hereford	379	340	78	89
Buckinghamshire	503	495	84	89
Saint George's	191	209	81	88
Kings College	280	280	78	87
Queen Elizabeth	615	571	83	86
South Manchester	396	337	88	86
Norfolk & Norwich	953	953	78	86
Calderdale	727	641	80	83
South Tees	1045	1060	74	82
North Cumbria	467	444	75	76
Hull & East Yorks	105	85	74	76
Bishop Aukland	351	351	67	76
North Durham	551	454	62	76

You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017



In the City

THE GROWING international and political furore surrounding the squalid decision to close down the Serious Farce Office investigation into the Al-Yamamah arms deal could well hasten the end of the SFO as a separate agency. That is now on the table as a result of the review into the SFO's effectiveness, ordered in the wake of the surrender over the Saudi kickbacks.

There are already those who believe that the SFO is headed for the same destination as the more short-lived but equally criticised Assets Recovery Agency: disappearance into Labour's latest law enforcement plaything, the Serious Organised Crime Agency.

The uproar following the further revelations of the £1bn paid in quarterly stipends since 1985 to Prince Bandar, son of the Saudi defence minister who signed the contract, has only served to prove how serious a miscalculation was made by the hapless Attorney-General Lord Goldsmith when he "encouraged" the SFO to drop the case on the spurious basis of "national security". The assumption made at the time last December appears to have been that the matter would blow over by Christmas!

This was one of several bad calls made by Goldsmith and the SFO over the BAE investigation since it began in 2004.

The initial misjudgement was to underestimate the extent to which the Saudis would be agitated by a probe into one of the corrupt ruling family's biggest earners. That they had their greedy hands in the Al-Yamamah till has been known since the contract was signed. Indeed Prince Bandar was identified as one of the prime beneficiaries by a London-based Saudi newspaper, *Sourakia*, in September 1985.

The Saudi sensitivities over this matter were quickly shown a month later when the *Observer* reported that there were to be commissions of up to £600m paid on the £4bn first stage of the deal to "leading members of the Saudi royal family". This produced a strong protest from the Saudi government which ensured that no copy of the article reached the kingdom. These protests were supported by the Foreign Office – just as Goldsmith's recent opposition to the SFO was backed by our man in Riyadh.

The same protests and the same British backing always swung into place whenever Al-Yamamah was mentioned afterwards – such as over the suggested role of Mark Thatcher. So when the SFO began the BAE inquiry with Goldsmith's presumed approval, there should have been little surprise at the Saudi opposition.

The second major misjudgement was in not bringing charges at an early stage against some lower-level BAE executives and facilitators. There were those inside the SFO who advised that early action should have been taken as soon as there was evidence of false accounting regarding the services provided to Prince Turki and his entourage, as well as the deceptive documentation provided to the Export Credit Guarantee Department stating that no commission or inappropriate payment was being made regarding the Saudi contract.

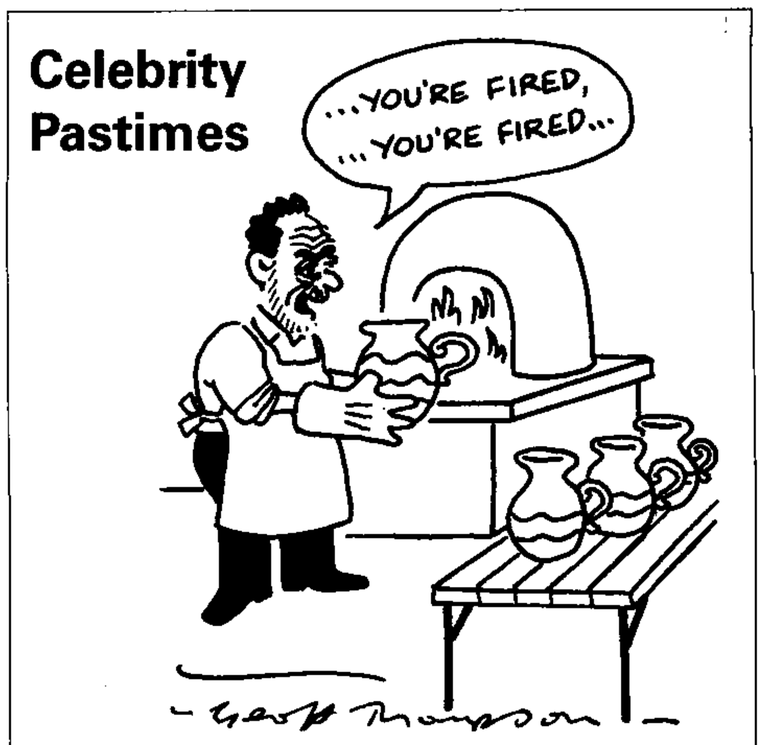
Had individuals been charged, it would have been very difficult to drop the case for political reasons on the basis that it was not going anywhere (the Goldsmith view). The pressure on BAE generated by the charges could also have changed its attitude or at least that of senior executives. In other words, the SFO could, as the Americans would do in such circumstances, have looked to rolling up the case along the BAE food chain, encouraging it to do a deal.

The modern US approach is to look for cases that can be made quickly and get "suits" into court, not – as is still sadly the SFO policy – to seek the mother lode of criminality and the indictment to end all indictments. That is a reason the SFO has just begun the trial over the 2001 collapse of Independent Insurance and has yet to begin that involving RBG Resources which crashed in 2002. So instead of looking to move quickly, the SFO widened the inquiry taking it further away from possibly provable offences against BAE figures and into the danger area of the Bandar payments.

As a result BAE did not feel any pressure to cooperate and instead devoted all its efforts to persuading the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign Office as well as its Saudi clients to intervene. Once there was the chance last year of a further massive extension of the Al-Yamamah contract, both BAE and the Saudis had a very big stick to wave.

Another miscalculation by both the SFO and Goldsmith was to overlook the defence which is now front and centre from BAE to all the payments and favours it did: the Saudis knew and approved. Furthermore, the payments made to Bandar were also known and approved by HMG from the get-go. All of which always made any prosecution of BAE difficult if not impossible to succeed on legal grounds. Not only had the Saudis approved what BAE did with its money, but they were never likely to assist any investigation in Saudi Arabia, never mind provide any witnesses. Bandar and Turki would have no doubt claimed sovereign immunity both as witnesses and in the unlikely event of there being any extradition request.

There was the added legal complication, admitted by Goldsmith in the Lords when conceding that there had been bribes/kickbacks, that any payment made before 2002 was not illegal under British law, however invidious. So, it might be asked, why not limit the SFO investigation from the start to those corruption offences that happened *after* that date? By failing to take the opportunities offered by prosecuting false accounting or deception and continuing instead to pursue corruption when that would either be statute-barred or impossible to prove given Saudi approval, the SFO set itself up for an embarrassing failure.



Alan Sugar's pottery class

That the BAE case was not going anywhere anytime soon should never have been a surprise to Goldsmith if he had been paying attention. It also should not have been a surprise to SFO director Robert Wardle with knowledge of the Al-Yamamah history once his investigators started threatening access to the Saudis' Swiss bank accounts.

Instead both men persisted in a course of action which was only ever going to end in tears. For Goldsmith it will be one more reason he will no doubt be surplus to Gordon Brown's requirements – perhaps once he has taken the fall of the "cash for honours" decision. For Wardle, he is anyway leaving next April. For the SFO – it remains to be seen whether BAE is the final farce that makes it history.

GOOD to see that Sir Ronald Cohen has joined the rush by private equity "locusts" to insist that they should indeed pay tax at a higher rate than those who clean their prestigious offices. As a big Labour donor Cohen – like fellow private equity donor Nigel Doughty (like Cohen he gave £250,000 last time) and lender Nigel Morris (£1m loan) – has already enjoyed the fruits of Gordon Brown's introduction of taper relief, which caps private equity millionaires' tax on their profits at 10 percent.

That number is also of course subject to further reduction by way of any capital losses. So after several years of serious money making, no wonder Cohen can assist Brown in putting out the growing private equity firestorm. Just how many millions he, like Morris and Doughty, have already made is indicated by the fact that Doughty is being sued by one of his former partners in Doughty Hanson who sold out last year claiming that his stake was worth more than £100m. Fair shares for all – it's the "new" Labour way!

PLANET FOOTBALL

Manchester City

NOW THAT the Thai authorities have frozen the local bank accounts belonging to deposed premier Thaksin Shinawatra as part of a corruption investigation, how exactly would any British bank or lawyer be able to certify – as required by money-laundering regulations – that any funds used to purchase Manchester City were not the proceeds of crime?

That requirement could be a much more serious and imminent threat to the deal than any future trial or conviction resulting in the saintly Shinawatra failing the FA's "fit and proper" test for football owners and directors.

Leeds United

THE FATE of chairman Ken Bates's bid to continue in control of the League 1 relegated club, backed by a trio of offshore entities whose generosity knows no bounds and no other recipient, may well be decided by the taxman.

Revenue & Customs is the second largest creditor owed £6.87m in tax and VAT after Astor

See over ☛

Investment Holdings, a British Virgin Islands-registered but Guernsey-managed company. Not surprisingly, the Revenue voted against the 1p-in-the-£ company voluntary arrangement (CVA) deal offered by Bates and supported by his offshore allies. The Revenue has to decide by the end of the month whether to challenge the vote in favour of the deal at the creditors' meeting.

The report from administrator KPMG states that Leeds had breached its agreement with the Revenue by not making a £200,000 monthly payment in March this year. This failure and a second non-payment in April triggered a winding-up petition from the taxman on 17 April. In "late March", no doubt by complete coincidence and with no knowledge of any contacts taking place between the Leeds directors and the Revenue, Astor and another offshore lender Krato Trust demanded that Leeds provide security to Astor for its £12.7m loan or face liquidation. Why the supposed unconnected Nevis company Krato should not then insist that it too was given security was not explained. In any event, on 4 April Astor was made the only secured creditor. This enabled it to appoint KPMG exactly a month later, two weeks after the Revenue filed its petition. A good reason for the taxman to be unhappy.

According to KPMG, which appears to have challenged nothing it was told by its appointer Astor, Krato or the Leeds main shareholder Forward Sport Fund, Astor is "owned by five discretionary trusts with no named beneficiaries". Such arrangements usually refer to what are called "purpose trusts". But such trusts usually have a "letter of wishes" which gives instructions to the trustees – in this case seemingly Nerine Trust in Guernsey – as to who they are to benefit. Such trusts also have a settlor or settlors and either a protector or custodian to see the trustees do as they are told. Did KPMG discover if there was a letter of wishes or who was the settlor/protector/custodian and who, therefore, were the real beneficiaries?

A similar opaque arrangement for many years was said to lie behind the Guernsey company Swan Management which controlled the largest shareholding in Chelsea when Bates was chairman.

Swan was linked to Guernsey accountant Patrick Murrin, a one-time Chelsea director. Interestingly, Krato shares the same Nevis address as Rivoli – a company linked with Murrin, a long-time associate of Bates. Murrin also features in the affairs of another Bates associate, South African but London-based Stanley Tollman. Tollman is currently fighting extradition to the US on tax and bank fraud charges in which Guernsey features. A decision on the case is due later this month. Tollman is in part hiding behind his elderly wife's fragile mental state as the reason he should not be sent to New York.

The US inquiries into Tollman may have encouraged the Guernsey financial regulator to mount an investigation into Murrin which with Chelsea helped the decision to retire from the trustee company he ran. It now emerges that Rivoli had factored a debt due from Sheffield United – paying a discounted amount up front and looking to make the collection. Rivoli was owed £625,000 when the Leeds music stopped.

Murrin, like Astor, also had an interest in Forward Sport Fund which is registered in the Cayman Islands at the offices of leading local lawyers Maples & Calder, once the firm of Tory MP John Maples. The firm's offices at Ugland House is home to thousands of companies. Earlier this month Ugland House featured in a hearing before the US senate finance committee which is examining tax evasion/avoidance by American companies. "The Ugland House office building in the Cayman Islands has been the source of much debate on the senate floor over the past few years. It's time the finance committee found out what was really going on there," declared committee member Senator Chuck Grassley. The committee has asked the US government accountability office to go to the Caymans to try to find out. If it does, maybe it could tell the Football Association which supposedly regulates Leeds.

'Slicker'

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by Cyclops

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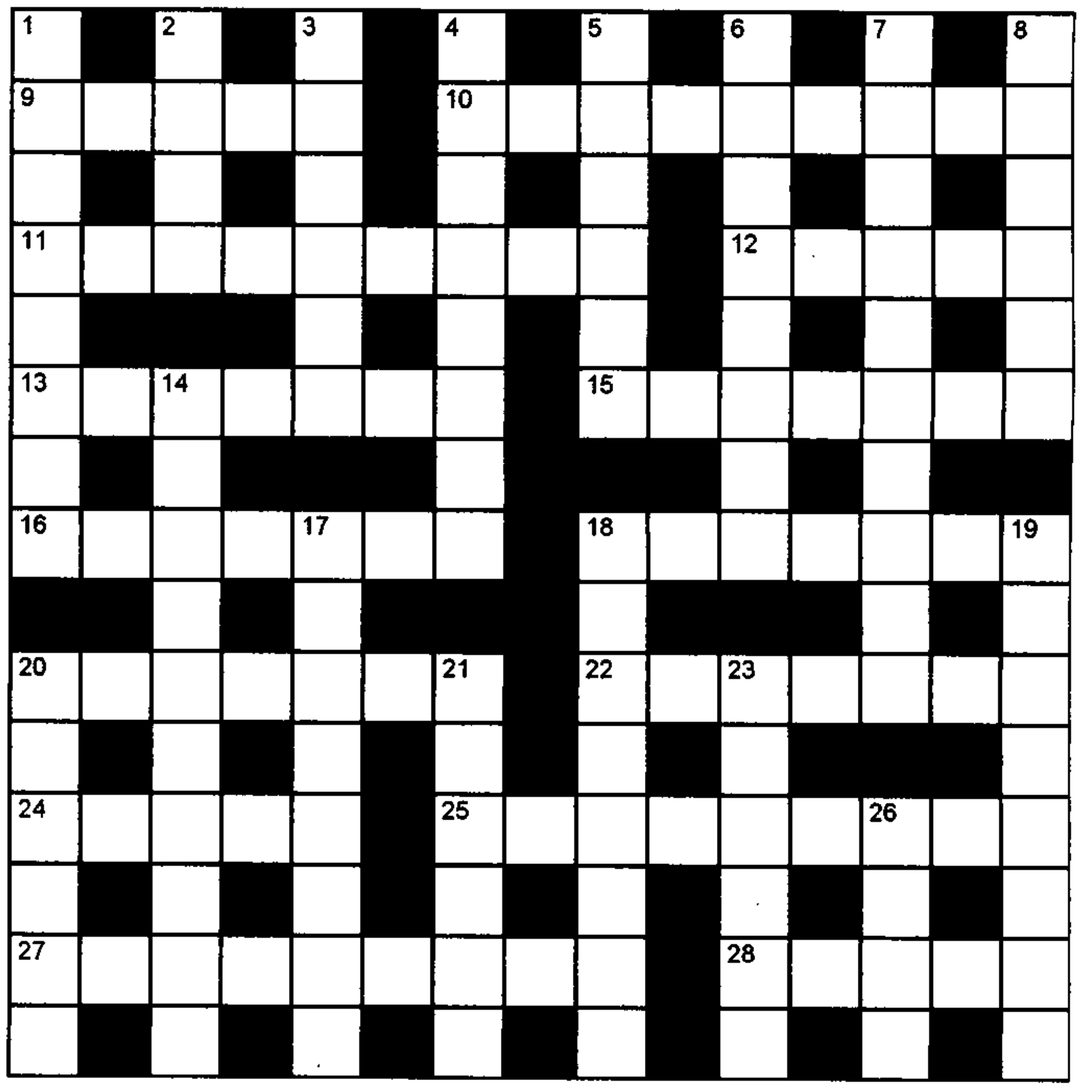

ACROSS

9 Marx making comeback as TV host (5)
10 "Bush deal finally kicked out by the people" shock (5,4)
11 Sense the acute pain behind the Mensa member? (5-4)
12/23/17 Invasion of privacy as justified by tabloid editor frequenting boozer with pointless parasites: "a diversion" (2,3,6,8)
13 Genuine old bastard (7)
15 Silly old fart, one replaced by energy engineer (7)
16 What emerges from Brighton: inner sign of troubled sleep for Brown soon? (7)
18 Place in which irate Cameron starts to be restrained by harassed whips (7)
20 Guardian arsehole hugging another arsehole with love (7)
22 Madonna, say, shoots gangster-style, thanks to Ritchie's introduction (3,4)
24 Go in for bondage (no time for anaesthetic) (5)
25 Supporter – but not of cabinet arses? (4-5)
27 Whore, not skirted, with ring – potential fortune to be got from this (9)
28 Heavy metal bar? (5)

DOWN

1 Relax free end of chain before having an erection (6,2)
2 See 26dn.
3 More pasty with nuts put before Brenda? (6)
4 A showy, though rather tame hand job, this, which won't lead to a bang (8)
5 Old boy caught getting stuck into spout thing (6)
6 Getting cold in hospital, south Paris did for him (8)
7 Maybe DaVinci Code's opening rot ain't so complicated (10)
8 Mate with devil getting runs almost at the start (6)
14 Male ex-convict in terrible soap leads as heard on radio (3,7)
17 See 12ac.
18 Not at a loss as to where to put one's balls? (2,6)
19 Divine, in Japan for a short time, getting *Hello!* involved in "Hot Rio" spread (8)
20 The place for office brats? (6)
21 Sack Hattersley – this is such an old-fashioned read! (3,3)
23 See 12ac.
26/2 Filth not to be seen here where public loos are quite absent? (2-2,4)

Crossword 341 winner: M. McMANUS

ACROSS: 7 Mobster 9 Angelic 10 Gunge 11 Mackenzie 12/28 Leadership contest 14 Abba 15 Fat cats 17 Erratum 20 Rice 21 Abstaining 23 Climb down 25 North 27 Ugandan.

DOWN: 1 Oban 2 St Helena 3 War crime 4 Ague 5 Elizabeth I 6 Eczema 7 Magaluf 8 Romps 13 Anticlimax 16 Subpoena 18 Reigning 19 Mug shot 20 Rectum 22 Tunic 24 Body 26 Reed.

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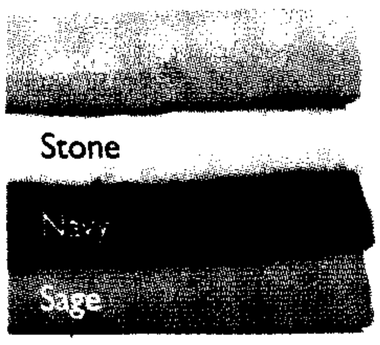

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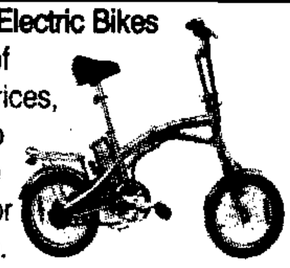

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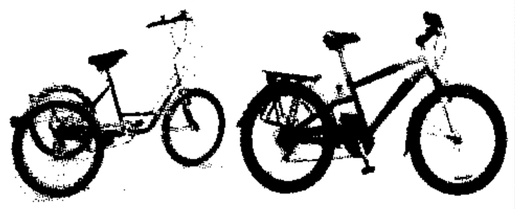

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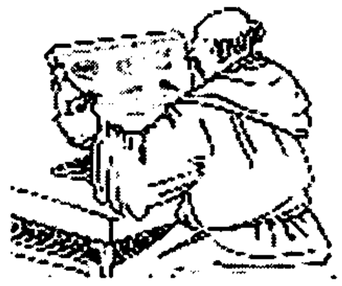

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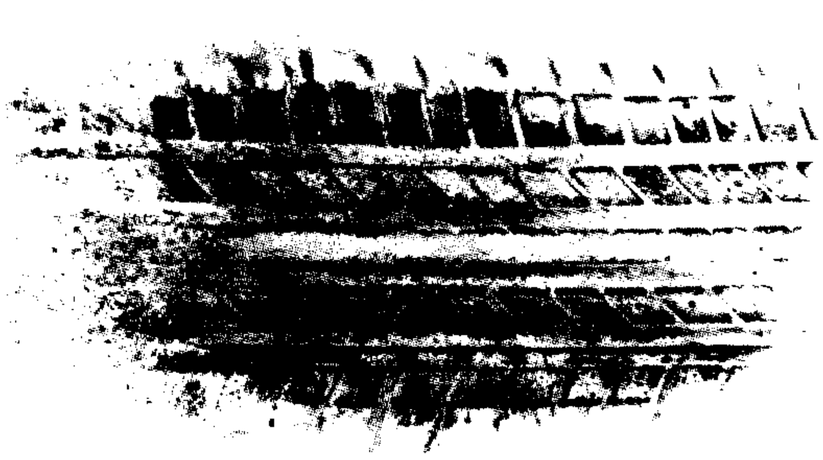

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